

THINKING TOGETHER

Ahalya Chari

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

Foreword

For the wholesome development of the personality of children, it is essential that they acquire not only the requisite knowledge and skills while they are at school, but also develop certain attitudes which will make them better human beings. If these attitudes are not developed at a young age, while the children's minds are still pliable, it becomes very difficult to help them grow in a healthy direction at a later stage. All educational committees and commissions, therefore, have stressed the need for imparting moral education or education in values to children at the school stage. In fact the new National Policy on Education (1986) states: "The growing concern over the erosion of essential values and an increasing cynicism in society has brought to focus the need for re-adjustment in the curriculum in order to make education a forceful tool for the cultivation of social, ethical and moral values".

While the need for education in values has been universally accepted, discussion is still on in many countries as to the best method of inculcating the right values in children. This is a new ground to be explored. Our efforts in the beginning have naturally to be tentative. With this in view, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) decided to embark upon a project on education in values. As a first step we sought to develop some help materials for teachers and students that would aid in the awakening of perceptions and the inculcation of values.

Thinking Together has been written by Professor (Km.) Ahalya Chari, former Principal of the Regional College of Education, Mysore, and also former Com-missioner, Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan. She is now actively engaged in guiding the educational work of the Krisnamurti Foundation. India. This book has been primarily written to promote discussions in the classroom between children and their teachers. The book has a universal appeal and deals with some essential human values in a non-denominational, non-sectarian manner. The style of presentation will have a special appeal for young boys and girls as it is simple, direct and friendly in its approach. I take this opportunity to thank Km. Ahalya Chari for the beautiful book she has written at our request inspite of other heavy demands on her time. The book speaks eloquently about her commitment to education and her love for children.

Dr. Anil Vidyalkar, Professor and Head of the Department of Education in Social Sciences and Humanities in the Council, has been looking after the programme of 'Education in Values' of which this book is a part. I thank him for the keen interest he has been taking in this important programme.

We are grateful to Km, Theima Rozario (retd.) Professor and Head of the Department of English of the S.I.E.T. Women's College, Madras, for kindly going through the manuscript and making valuable suggestions and to Km. Sudha of The School, KFI, Adyar, Madras, for secretarial assistance.

We hope the issues discussed here will open new avenues for exploration and provide new insights to young adolescents. Suggestions and comments on this book will be highly appreciated.

New Delhi
P, L. MALHOTRA
Director

National Council of Educational Research and Training

A Word to the Teacher

This little book entitled *Thinking Together* goes out to children in the NCERT's series on Value Education.

Having been a teacher for many years, I should like to share with teachers, freely and frankly, as from one teacher to another the thoughts and concerns that have gone into this book.

Although we teach different subjects throughout the day, we know deep within us that we are doing much more than that. We are touching children's minds and hearts in far deeper ways than is evident. In the classroom it is one human being speaking to several young ones and the best comes forth. We may be worried about a hundred things; we may be battling inside us about life's curious ways, but in the classroom with those young, bright eyes and beautiful faces looking up at us, there is only the art of communication holding the mind for the moment. You must have felt, as I have done, some great moments come intensely alive in class. Those were, perhaps, moments when the gleam in a child's eye pointed to the fact that he had perceived the truth of what you are attempting to say. The art of teaching is the art of helping children perceive truths. Words, gestures, are merely tools.

In like manner Value Education is not a matter of teaching some concepts, however noble, for children to hold in the brain theoretically. It is not a matter of giving them a set of dogmas, doctrines or beliefs. It is not a matter of moralising, preaching. Never attempt that, for today's children are very different. When *we* are not in actual life what we say *they* ought to be, it does not carry conviction. They do not respect us and without respect there can be no give and take. So let us look at the communication of values as the very gentle art of helping children look at themselves and the people around them.

It is in the matrix of relationship that one can watch life's play. It is there that one perceives great things and small.

It is for this reason that although the book deals with values such as responsibility and sharing, cooperation and integrity, questioning and self-reliance, etc., it tries not to talk down to children. These thirty-five pieces are descriptions of little episodes in the life of children of the age group 12 to 15, incidents of everyday occurrence with which they can identify themselves and in so doing, open up their own beings to themselves. The material is simple and straightforward.

There is, therefore, a different approach that one should take in inculcating values through the use of this book. In the first place let us be clear that we are not communicating a set of theories in the abstract to a 'class' which is another abstraction. On the contrary, we are helping Vinay see what happens when one does not keep a promise; we are pointing out to Meera all that she suffers when she gets hurt about small things that seem big to her; we are asking Aslam and Shefali to look into what relationship is, what sharing and cooperation are. To another child who is highly competitive, a new trend of thought may occur in the understanding of little Hameeda's plight in the episode *On Competition*. Most pieces deal with the different states of their own mind, their little dilemmas, the struggles they go through and so on. My point is that it is in understanding one's own thought processes and feelings that a perception of what is false and what is true occurs.

There are also passages that endeavour to help children become aware of their environment, of society and its problems, of the country and the world. There are other passages that ask them to care for the earth for it is theirs, their heritage. Throughout, the movement is towards the development of a concern for the country and its people, particularly the poor and the weak, and for mankind. It attempts to bring to the fore that which is human in humanity.

How would one go about teaching the book? Don't teach it. Let it speak to you and to the children if there be anything of worth in it. By that I mean do not turn it into yet another textbook to be studied assiduously. On the contrary use the passages for dialogue and discussion. You could take the liberty to build around a piece other instances relevant to your group of children, keeping to the trend of the piece. The temptation to be didactic or to moralise should be avoided at all costs. It is in the dialogue with your class that much of what is of significance to children in their own lives will get revealed, thus helping the teacher to understand the child better.

Then again, as is hinted in the book itself, in various parts perception leads to *feeling* and *action*. Aditi sees for herself the injustice in ill treating girls and women feels concerned and acts. The children grasp deep within themselves the ugliness of throwing garbage around and act. And so on. Likewise, apart from dialogues and discussions one could take up projects and activities, if your school is flexible enough to allow that. At any rate, do not be in a hurry to finish the book. Dip into it leisurely and build upon the values being communicated, gently, patiently, taking one passage and its ramifications over two or three lessons or even more. The intention is that such an approach could be tried as resource material in classes VII, VIII and IX. Hence there are included some easy episodes and ideas and some more complex issues. You can choose what is most suited for each age and not feel tied down to the order in the book. One can envisage that teachers may be faced with one or two problems. First of all, when does one use this book? It could be used to say, a *culture* class to be set apart once a week or even once a fortnight for this purpose. In some schools that is being tried. Otherwise, one has to find opportunities to divert the class from the learning of a subject to a discussion of this kind once in a while. Or, perhaps, some other teacher is absent and you are deputising for her and that happens so often. Take a small piece and generate a discussion, the most satisfactory arrangement is, of course, to schedule one period per week in classes VII to IX for purposes of general discussion on such themes.

The second problem one might face is the difficult level of the language in the book. No attempt has been made to confine it to graded structures and vocabulary, for that would have hampered the free flow of thought. So, teachers have to communicate the ideas in simple words of their own or in the vernacular. What is important is to move with the child, exploring new avenues of perceptions and discoveries. The intention is to make its progress a very joyous experience for teacher and child, full of the delight that comes with self-understanding and sharing.

Finally, the state of one's own mind is equally important. Has one gone into these truths for oneself at some point or another? Does one have a global, universal mind, or is one attached to a particular region, language, sect? If we are narrow in our outlook, however well we may teach, these ideas will not ring true. For Value Education is, ultimately, being honest with oneself and with the children. Therefore, this is a task to be taken up with a profound sense of responsibility, care and concern, with the spirit of a scientist tempered by all that is human in man.

64-65, Greenways Road Madras 600 028

AHALYA CHARI

Krishnamurti Foundation India

Contents

1. Naveen in a New School
2. Home and Its Influence
3. Keeping a Promise
4. Temperament and Orderliness
5. Would You Like to Be Self-Reliant?
6. Making Decisions
7. The Art of Conversation
8. The Joy of Sharing
9. On Competition
- 10- On Relationship
- 11- Leisure**
- 12. On People and Their Ways**
- 13- School Day
14. On Getting Hurt
- 15. Meeting a Challenge**
- 16. Questions That Troubled Aditi**
17. On Money
18. Excitement with the New
19. Parents' Anxieties

20. On Beauty
21. When Trees Hold a Conference What Do They Do?
22. Who Cares for Public Property?
23. Caring for the Environment
24. On Being Afraid
25. Feelings
26. The Art of Questioning
27. Heroes in Our Lives
28. Battling with Books
29. The Human Spirit
30. Getting to Know Our Villages
31. On Pressure
32. The Sorrow of Division
33. A Dialogue
34. Ravi's Quest for the Meaning of Religion
35. What Does Progress Mean?

1. Naveen in a New School

It was Naveen's first day at the new school and the day of the admission tests. It was a reputed school with more than eight hundred students. However, Naveen liked his old school; a small, unknown but homely school. Most of the teachers were kind and the boys were friendly. He would have preferred to continue there but he had been promoted to the eighth class and his parents felt that he ought to pass the tenth out of a well-known school, for this would enable him to get admission into a good college. His parents had discussed this quite often at dinner and finally decided to take him out of his old school. Naveen never understood their logic but, then, he told himself, there were many things about grown-ups that he could not understand and so he gave up churning his mind about things beyond him.

His parents wanted him to go to this big school where students wore sparkling white uniforms, with a red tie and black shining shoes and everything seemed to have a polished look. On one occasion his father had said that he would speak to a person of influence who would in turn speak to someone so that he could get admitted to this school of distinction. Naveen was offended; he did not like this, for had they not told him earlier that bright students who passed their entrance tests would be admitted? He had always stood first in his school and was more than confident he would fare well in the tests but his parents were nervous for some reason he could not understand.

On the day of the admission tests he saw more than a hundred students and about four times the number of parents! It was quite bewildering and he was quickly whisked away into a small room in a far off corner with about twenty others. He was first given the maths test which he cleared without any difficulty, for maths was his favourite subject. At

one point, Naveen felt choked, for he remembered his maths teacher, the very lovable man he had left behind, and he blinked away the tears which had welled up. He wondered what the new man would be like. The next test was Hindi which he could not do so well. They asked him several questions in grammar and although he knew the language well enough to compose poems in it, he could not make anything of what the grammarians said about the language. “These grown-ups have a way of complicating simple things,” he thought. Then followed an English test about which he was extremely diffident, for he had been told he would have to compete with boys who were very good in the subject as they came from important towns. In fact, after great effort he had learnt by heart a long poem by a man called Longfellow, but when he was asked to recite it, the words would not flow. The English teacher seemed to have a certain steely look about him that took all the courage out of him. After this experience he muddled up even his essay on, ‘How I spent my summer holidays’. He could not remember having had a holiday, leave alone spending it, for he had spent the time preparing for these tests! His parents and relatives had been after him to make the grade — all of them — father, mother, uncle and cousin.

When the results were announced Naveen did not go to school. Father did not either, nor mother. His cousin went and came back triumphantly waving his hands. Naveen had been admitted although his name was last on the list. “So Mr. X has managed the admission. Good”, said father. Naveen was again offended, for he was sure that he had secured his admission only because he had done well in the tests.

That night, Naveen went to bed rather dejected. He had loved his old school. It was in a ramshackle building with very little drinking water and the classrooms were dingy, but his headmaster loved him and his maths teacher was kind. They used to play a lot of improvised games morning and evening, as there were no hockey sticks or proper playgrounds. The new school was different. It had an imposing building and it was neat and clean and boys from “good” homes attended it. But Naveen wondered what the people inside were like. That night he dreamed of a large bird carrying away a frightened boy, read to drop him into a strange land. It is so true, isn’t it, that it is the warmth of the people that makes you feel at home in a place? Buildings are important and good furniture, of course. If, in addition, there are large grounds and a sense of space and if there are beautiful trees and flowers, a school would be a most welcome place to go to. But most important of all are the feelings of the people inside and this Naveen found out quite soon.

Have you faced any difficulties in new situations? What is your idea of a good school? What are some things that grownups around you say or do that you do not understand? Think upon these things and discuss them in class.

2. Home and Its Influence

Some children are naturally very helpful. They do not at all have to be told to help. That was so with Ayesha. The moment she saw any teacher, her own, or anyone else walking down the corridor with a pile of books, she would run up and offer to carry them. She would notice the state of the black-board before a teacher came in and she would wipe it clean and keep a chalk-piece and duster ready. If the *mali* was seen carrying two pots of water she would offer to take one and start watering the plants. It all came very naturally to her — picking up a stone on the road, putting away waste paper in the

dustbin, lifting a child that had fallen, helping back-stage at any school function, cleaning up the art room after the class was over, putting the *tanpura* back in its case, carrying hockey sticks to the fields and bringing them back after the game, distributing sweets on an occasion, and she did it all with quiet dignity and a smile. She never felt that she was doing something unusual. It seemed the most natural thing for her and she delighted in helping others.

When the school announced the forming of a Social Service Squad she was the first to opt for it although it was really meant for the senior students. She begged her teacher to let her join and be an assistant to the school volunteers of the ninth and tenth classes. They all liked her so much that they welcomed her. The first expedition was to the Children's Orthopaedic Centre of the local hospital. There, for the first time, Ayesha encountered human suffering of a kind she had never seen before and she was moved. She was only twelve years of age then and to see a boy in a plaster cast whose knee had fractured, a girl limping with one crutch, a small child in a perambulator who she discovered had contracted polio, another boy with his shoulder in plaster and several such cases must have been a difficult experience; and, on the first day, she was very quiet, content to move along with her seniors. Sarla held her hand warmly and that made her feel brave and after a couple of visits she became one of the regular visitors to the centre. She would read stories to the young ones or tell them jokes or help generally. They all said she would grow to be a good nurse or doctor, for she was so warm-hearted. Helping these children, Ayesha became more aware of various kinds of disabled people around her home and neighbourhood; the beggar with a crutch, the blind girl who sang beautifully, the basket weaver squatting on the wayside who had no legs and so on. She was indeed a sensitive child.

Perhaps Ayesha's home was, in some measure, responsible for cultivating this deep sensitivity in her. Her mother was a primary school teacher and her father worked in a bank. They were both very hard-working people but Ayesha grew up watching how father helped her mother in the household work. He would do all the shopping, cut vegetables, cook, wash dishes. He had taken on himself the task of putting Ayesha to bed till she was five. Her mother too was very efficient in household work and, in addition, would help her father in drafting letters for she had an M.A. degree in English. It was a delight to see how husband and wife managed everything together, sharing and helping to produce together the right climate in the home. Ayesha grew up in such an atmosphere of security and contentment and learnt to lend a hand naturally without any fuss.

But a day came, when Ayesha realised that not all fathers were like hers, naturally inclined to help in the kitchen or the household. She had gone to her neighbour's house. Her friend Shankar lived there. He was also of her age although he went to another school, a boy's school in town. Shankar's mother was doing all the cooking herself and Ayesha discovered that everyday she spent most of her time in the kitchen making *puris*, potatoes, *gulab jamuns* and all kinds of delicious things for the father and son. Shankar's father had a small business of his own and was out most of the day. When he returned in the evening he expected to be waited upon by his wife. He also seemed quite distant and harsh with her and it seemed he felt that wives should not be encouraged to talk too much. As a result, there wasn't much conversation and the father, it was apparent, was the lord of the house. Shankar's mother accepted this as her lot. In fact she would tell Ayesha in her son's presence that after all she was a woman and women were meant to

manage homes and look after the men in the household Shankar accepted all this unquestioningly and grew up to have similar notions. One day, when Ayesha asked Shankar why he couldn't help his mummy in the kitchen he said to her haughtily, "Oh! that's girl's work. I don't go to the kitchen. I am going to be a pilot and fly in the air. Look at my mini-aeroplane".

This troubled Ayesha and she wondered whether boys were meant to have all the adventure and fun that an outdoor life offered them and girls had only to stay home and cook. She asked her mother why Shankar's parents were different and whether girls were meant to restrict themselves to the home. Her mother pointed out that, on the contrary, there were so many new professions that were now open to girls. They were becoming architects, engineers, air hostesses, nurses, tourist-guides, researchers, receptionists, telephone-operators and so on, apart from being doctors and teachers. Girls were also taking part in international sports, and in mountaineering and hiking. Likewise, she said, many men now help in the home because servants are not available or are too expensive to hire. "Times are changing", she pointed out, "and no longer is home-making the only thing a woman need do, although it is very important and a mother must not neglect her home." She said her father was a wonderful man and she wished there were more like him.

Now what are your own views? Do you think girls must be confined to the kitchen and boys should keep out of it, like Shankar had grown to believe, because his parents set that example? Perhaps you could have a discussion on this.

Also consider what made Ayesha such a helpful girl. Was it her home or was she born with that trait? What part does the atmosphere in a home play in developing your inner nature? What part do the beliefs of teachers play in helping you form opinions? Are you influenced by them?

Have you been influenced by your friends outside school?

Think upon these things.

3. Keeping a Promise

Sruti was studying for her B.A. exam which she was going to answer privately after having absented herself from the last one on account of illness. She was a diligent student and had planned her studies very methodically. She awaited her brother Vinay's arrival from school that evening, because he had promised to bring her on the way home an important book, *History of India* by Ishwari Prasad. Her cousin was also studying for the same exam and they often shared books. Vinay, as he entered the house, looked shabby and full of dust after the games at school, and her first question was, "Have you brought the book?" Vinay faltered, remembered, felt ashamed, mumbled something and moved away quickly, feeling very guilty. He had not kept his promise. He was feeling very bad because he was fond of his sister and especially after her recent illness, he had tried to be kind and considerate to her. Sruti noted that he had not kept his word and as she had been looking forward to the book all day long she lost her temper. She also recalled that earlier, one day, he had forgotten to bring her some medicine that she had needed urgently. A scene followed between brother and sister and their mother had to intervene to bring peace to the household. Mother was worried about Vinay. He was becoming

thoughtless and conceited and she wondered why, at fifteen, he was so careless and even self-cantered.

If you observe your friends and look around a bit, you will come across many people, young and old who do not keep the promises they make and if you go into it further, you will discover that a number of difficulties are caused because of this. That girl Lakshmi for instance, had recently promised her mother that she would enquire at the school office for an application form for her brother's admission to school, but she forgot to do so for a whole week. Her mother was furious. Lakshmi tried to justify herself needlessly and told several lies in the bargain. Her mother was put to a lot of trouble and anxiety. She found out that the last date for submission of forms was over and the boy had to wait for another six months to get a place and that too in another school! Sometimes it happens that a whole group of children in a class make a promise to their teacher which they do not keep. Miss Susan Fernandes was an extremely hard-working teacher and expected the highest standards of conduct from her students. She was the teacher for the seventh class. That day she had to attend a teachers' meeting in the last period. She asked her class of thirty, whether they would tidy up the classroom, put books and note-books away neatly, change the display on the notice boards, tidy up the room and arrange the furniture for the exhibition to be held the next day. She had made groups and told them what to do. With one voice they had all promised that she need not worry, as it would all be done. When the bell rang they did start to work together, but soon, it was evident that only one or two in each group were serious. The others began to play or tease each other and made such a nuisance of themselves that Ajit who was usually their natural leader, ordered them out. He was a very responsible boy and the class respected him. Apparently, most of the students were not serious when they promised their teacher that they would clean up the room. They had spoken mechanically, thoughtlessly. If you watch yourself and those around you, you will notice that we do that too, many times.

Of course many grown up people are equally careless about the promises they make. Take the mechanic, for instance, who promises to come in the morning to repair the water-tap that is leaking and keeps you waiting the whole day; the young man who promises to meet his friend at the market place at a certain time and forgets about it; or the woman who promises to help and doesn't turn up. The classical example, of course, is that of some politicians who promise a hundred things like drinking water, better roads, schools, etc., to the poor, during election time and then do not keep any of them.

On the contrary, take the case of mother, who almost always keeps her promises. Perhaps it is a small thing like making you some *halwa* or buying a shirt or a frock or helping you with your home-work. If she is unable to do so she will say, "Sorry", and not say one thing and do another. Why is that so? Why are mothers generally careful about keeping their promises? What is there so special about them? Could it be that they care for you so much, they naturally do whatever they have said they would? And does this mean that people forget to keep their promises because they don't care deeply enough? Or can it be that we often make promises to put an end to a problem? And also, perhaps, we don't really mean what we say, so we do not feel compelled to keep our word. There could be many reasons why we do not keep promises. Find out what they could be.

Would you put down, sometime when you are free, all the promises you have made to others and have kept, as also those you did not keep? Also note down promises others made to you and kept or did not keep.

Look into the reasons and discuss with friends the nature of the mind that keeps promises and the mind that does not generally do so.

You can talk about an experience and try to convey your feelings.

4. Temperament and Orderliness

Anita was a very neat girl by temperament. She was always tidy in her dress and her habits; her hair was always combed, made into two plaits and tied with ribbons of a colour matching her dress. She wore simple clothes, always washed and ironed. The slippers or shoes she wore were polished brown or white as the case may be. She was only twelve years old and people wondered how she could be so meticulous. It was a pleasure to see the satchel she carried to school. Her books were arranged in perfect order; her note-books in a neat pile, all carefully covered with brown paper. Her handwriting was very good and she took care to draw the margin, with the date written on the left hand top corner, a line drawn after each exercise, as indicated by her teacher as necessary. At home she was the one who tidied things up and her mother was proud of her.

Anita was fond of Bijoy, her classmate, because he was very intelligent, and together, they would share books and stories and incidents. Bijoy was a different type of person and his untidy ways and careless temperament often worried Anita. He did not care about his clothes. The buttons were often missing, the shorts never ironed; or he would wear a not-so-clean pair of shoes. His hair was unkempt and falling over his forehead. He was capable of looking neat, capable of arranging things tidily and this was truly so, for, whenever the teacher spoke to him firmly he would mend his ways. However, very soon he would lapse into his usual self and become careless again. It was difficult for him to share with Anita the thought that when everything around you was in the right order, it gives you a good feeling.

The teacher then tried another approach to make him feel the need for orderliness. She put him in charge of maintaining class order. He protested that he was hardly the person for such a responsibility, but the teacher insisted and with some persuasion from Anita he agreed. This meant that he had to be very watchful about everything in class. He had to come ten minutes earlier, see whether all the desks and chairs were arranged properly and put them in order if they were not. He had to see that the windows were bolted and were not half-open. He had to observe if the class time-table was hung straight and so, too, the picture on the wall. Have you noticed that many schools have pictures on the wall but some of them are usually tilted at an angle of 45° and hundreds of people pass by and hardly anyone takes pity on the fate of these pictures? Bijoy also had to inspect the dress and shoes of his classmates as they came into the class. Of course he bossed over some of them who were milder than him and kept his distance from the bullies of the class who teased him, but on the whole, they were cooperative and the whole class looked neater. What is more, he had to set an example himself and see that his shoe-lace was tied and

his hair combed back neatly. Anita enjoyed seeing the transformed Bijoy and chuckled to herself silently.

Do you notice that when you accept responsibility you become much more observant than you normally are? This brings about greater clarity to the mind. Your own confusions are cleared. Your mind is in order. And, therefore, it places everything outside in order. It is with inner order that there comes outer order. And inner order is not so much a matter of temperament as of observation and watchfulness. All of us can be that way, if we want to. Habits are mechanical; a result of training, but the urge for orderliness is a beautiful thing which comes from within.

Of what temperament are you? Do you dress neatly and keep your books and notebooks and other belongings carefully, or are you a person who has to be reminded again and again? Have you observed how orderly you are in daily life? Would you like to find out for yourself what you normally do about each item in the list given below? Try it for fun.

Dress neatly, comb my hair and look tidy.

Tie shoe lace, polish shoes or chappals regularly.

Make my bed neatly every morning.

Wash my hands every time before a meal.

Tend to eat too fast.

Usually talk too loudly.

Tend to interrupt others when they are speaking.

Be punctual always.

Do yoga or exercise daily.

Break a queue when I want something quickly.

Pluck leaves from plants when walking by.

Use the dustbin for throwing paper, etc.

Cross a road only when the traffic signal indicates that I may.

Clear up things after a get-together (e.g., a picnic).

Thank somebody when required to do so.

Dust a table or chair when I see dust on it.

Use public property carefully.

Speak gently to servants.

You may be able to put down a few more of your tendencies and actually observe them in daily life.

5. Would You Like to Be Self-Reliant?

Then listen to what they do in this school.

There were two visitors to their school that week, two very bright and interesting teachers from Japan. As this was a small town the visitors were all the more welcome for you do not normally see people from other lands in less known places. The visitors spent five days in the school observing classes and activities, talking to teachers and students, and to them, it was obvious that this was a school with a difference. It was a small school with only four hundred students, boys and girls from well educated homes. It was considered the best school in town.

One striking feature the visitors observed in this school was that for an hour every morning some twelve children drawn from all the classes did all kinds of chores for the school, looking after it as it were. Their work included seeing to the general cleanliness of the school and its surroundings, clearing weeds in the little school garden, watering plants, helping in the canteen, ringing the bell, taking visitors around, attending to sick students - learning to cope with electricity problems and leaking taps. In fact, they were all over the place, running the school as it were. Every child had his turn and all the work was done quietly, efficiently and happily. A different teacher supervised them each day.

The visitors were so impressed with this New India before them that they requested that a discussion should be arranged with the students. About a hundred from class eight upwards were present. The visitors told the students how much they appreciated this activity of their school and congratulated them. Then they asked them why they were doing such work and enquired if a school was not meant for learning different subjects like history-, geography, physics, maths, etc. They asked if manual work should find place in a school- They were, in fact, trying to see if the children valued what they were doing. The replies of the students were very revealing and showed that they were capable of fresh and original thinking:

“This is also learning because we learn so many new things.”

“This is more practical than what we learn from books.”

“Much more interesting. We enjoy doing work with our hands.”

“More fun than being tied to books.”

“It is necessary these days to learn to work with our hands because it is not easy to get servants.”

“I have learnt to repair things at home too.”

“We learn to work together.”

After the visitors left, the Headmaster continued the discussion and asked the group how they could further improve this activity at school and asked for suggestions. The students responded very enthusiastically:

“We should have greater variety and more things to do.” “We would like to go out of the school sometimes and help in the city.” “We need soap, towels and washing facilities.”

“We would like to learn how machines work, e.g., engine, cars, etc.” “We want to work on a farm, milking cows and harvesting rice, etc.” The children in this school, as you can see, were learning to be self-reliant and not dependent on anyone to do the jobs

that require the use of the hands. Have you observed at home or in the neighbourhood what kind of work domestic servants have to do? Men and women who are very poor and have large families, offer to work as servants in a home. They sweep and mop floors, wash and dry clothes, wash vessels, remove garbage, run errands and guard the house sometimes. Why do you think some people get their own work done by servants? Is it because they think that working with their brains, sitting at a desk all day, wearing clean clothes is superior to working with their hands and perspiring in the heat? Is it because they are lazy? And what about the servants? Not having gone to school themselves, what other job can they do if they are not to take up domestic service? What can the country do for them?

Think upon these things.

Again notice that there is another group of servants supposed to be of a low caste, although they are also human beings like us — the people we call sweepers or *jamadar* who clean the garbage on the roads and also wash and clean the lavatories in our own homes. Don't you feel outraged that educated people should allow this? Do you realise that if a child is born to a sweeper he may have to carry on the same work as he grows up if he is not given the opportunity to go to school? Why should he? Of course, things are now changing in our country and many people realise that these practices are wrong and they have begun to rely on themselves-, and there are many opportunities available for the children of the less fortunate people in society. Yet a lot more needs to be done.

Are you aware that Mahatma Gandhi worked for the poorest people with great passion? Sometimes he lived in the colonies of the *jamadars*. He cleaned his own lavatory and made the people in his Ashram at Wardha or Sabarmati do the same. He taught us that all work is holy if done in the right spirit. He also taught us that human kind must not be divided into castes. No person is high or low because of his birth.

Now will you begin by doing your own work both at home and at school and learn to use your hands also? Will you learn to do small things like sweeping, scrubbing, gardening, varnishing, repairing a fuse or plumbing, washing clothes or dishes, cooking, white-washing, etc.? There is great beauty in working with one's hands.

Does this activity of the school appeal to you?

6. Making Decisions

Sonali went to school by the school bus. She was in the sixth class and she was a thoughtful girl. Most children chatted in the bus and sometimes made a great deal of noise till they heard their teacher raise her voice. Immediately a lull would follow for a few minutes, succeeded by another round of chatter. But Sonali was never like the others. She would look out of the window and watch the scenes that caught her eye.

On that particular day she reflected upon what the huge boards on both sides of the road had to say. One spoke of the best butter, another of A, B, C tyres, a third of a new clock, a fourth about some new hotel, a new bank, and so on. They all had very interesting pictures, large ones, and they all seemed to say that they were the best. So Sonali asked her teacher that day why there were so many boards in the city and who put them up. Her teacher explained that those were known as hoardings and every company that produced things or had some service to offer like a hotel or a bank used these boards

to advertise their products so that people came to know of them. "The cleverer, the bolder the advertisement, the greater the sales", she said. Sonali was quite amused that the things she saw and used in her house, like toothbrush, toothpaste, cream and powder, squashes, jams, woollens, bed-sheets and towels or radio and transistor were all advertised at sometime or the other. She learnt that these companies spent a lot of money on advertisements because they wanted to attract more and more people so that their sales would go up and their profits too! Business is a strange world. It deals not only with making things but with making people buy these things and the more subtle and clever your ways of influencing the minds of people the greater your success as a businessman!

Sonali also found out that apart from hoardings at street corners, business-men used radio advertisements, the television, and the cinema as more effective means of telling people what to buy. She remembered, how, before the commencement of a film and during the interval there were several slides advertising some household goods or the other.

The next time she spoke to her teacher, she placed before her another problem. If there were two convincing advertisements about the same item, for example, two types of cloth or pens, how would one decide which one to buy? Do you go by the more powerful advertisement? How would you come to a right decision in a shop? This puzzled her.

Her teacher pointed out very patiently that there could be two ways of going about it. One, you imitated what other people bought and, unable to decide for yourself, for fear of making a mistake, you picked up whatever is popular. "Is this right?"¹ she asked. Sonali thought that making a blind choice based on other people's ideas without thinking for oneself may not be right. So she said "No, I don't think that is right." Then there is the other way by which you keep yourself fully informed of all the latest things available; watch the advertisements find out if that particular brand of item is suited to you and your way of life; also consider if you can afford it, think on these things, and then buy. "This might be the intelligent way," she said. Every time you are influenced by other people and don't use your own judgement it may be harmful. For example, some advertisers ask you to take a tablet every time you have a headache or cold. This may not be the right advice for your kind of body and you have to find out for yourself what suits you. Gradually you will learn to make intelligent choices, she said. Notice that what Sonali learnt about the influence of advertisements can be extended to other things. Take the way we dress or the fashion of our hair-style, etc. Do you notice how much you are influenced by your own favourite film heroes or heroines, their latest style of dress, the way their hair is combed and dropped over the forehead or the sandals they wear, etc., which, of course, changes from film to film and you have to change, too, likewise. When you are influenced either by advertisements or by your heroes and heroines, what happens is that even if you want to break away and be independent, original and true to your own nature, you feel awkward and out of place and wonder what your classmates will say. Do you notice that the influence of your classmates on you is so strong that you would hesitate to be different from them lest they should laugh at you or make fun of you? But if you are strong inwardly and learn to be independent of others you will soon lose your fear of others and, perhaps, you will be a happier person for that.

The art of making decisions, small ones or big, has to be learnt now, isn't it? It may be small things of daily life like 'Should I continue to play or do my home-work?' or a

slightly bigger decision like 'Should I study Science or Arts after class ten'? Whatever it is, if you learn to think for yourself now, it will help you when you grow up. At that time you have to take bigger decisions: what career to follow, whom to marry, what work to do for the country and so on. It is good to learn the art of thinking for oneself when one is young; otherwise we may all lead unthinking lives, always influenced by other people, which may not be a good thing after all.

What do you think? Will you exercise your brains right now and find out the answer to these questions?

7. The Art of Conversation

Conversation is a great art well worth understanding. My friend, Kalyani, has a fund of information about things around us, about flowers and birds, about cities and villages, about pollution and environment, about yoga and herbal medicine, about literature and religion, theatre and music and about so many other things. She takes a keen interest in life. She is alive and aware. It is an education conversing with her for she shares with fervour, the knowledge of things she has learnt over the years, through observation and experience, and enjoys talking to people.

Then there is my friend Daniel, who is not so well informed about subjects like science or history but has travelled widely and has done a lot of mountaineering and hiking in the hills. The tales he relates of his adventures are a pleasure to listen to. He speaks with an enthusiasm which is infectious and he does not monopolise the conversation as some people do. He will draw you in, by asking you little questions about your own experiences. As a result you never feel tired listening to him, for both of you are partaking of a dialogue. Begum Khatoon is of a different kind. Shy and diffident. She speaks slowly, gently and her conversation has a lasting effect on you because she is straight and simple and speaks of things that go to the heart. She will ask you how you feel and what you like most and will talk about the little things that give her joy. It is so true, isn't it, that you feel comfortable and at ease when you are in conversation with gentle people who are not pushing their personalities on to you?

Another type is Uncle Mohan and his companions. They are always talking vehemently against something or the other they have read in the current newspapers or magazines; condemning somebody, agreeing with one item, disagreeing with another. They have several opinions about the government, about industry and trade, about textiles and handloom, about America and Russia and so on. They go on and on and no one pays attention to the other. Sometimes it starts well but soon deteriorates into a heated discussion, with everyone present taking sides on the issue, or pressing his point of view alone. So it often resembles the confused jumble of sounds we hear when our radios are not tuned on correctly. There can be very little communication, is it not, if each one has and expresses strong opinions? So tired is Auntie Shanti of these loud discussions in their home that she turns a deaf ear to them and busies herself in one corner with her knitting. It all seems so different from her own girlhood home, where everyone conversed quietly and visitors brought a lot of cheer with them. Have you noticed another thing? People are quite often very respectful and even show deference in their speech and behaviour with their superiors and yet are very rude and inconsiderate in speech and conduct with their subordinates?

Let us consider how children converse at school. When you are together at recess time, what do you talk about? Perhaps about how you spent your holiday, what you have just bought, what you like to do. But when you talk, you will agree that several of you talk at the same time. No one listens to the other. No one speaks in a soft tone. Very often pupils at a school shout. The art of conversation is different. It is not loud, idle chatter at the top of your voice. It is good that there is so much energy, so much fun to share but it is sad that most of us do not know how to listen to each other; isn't this so? Notice another thing. At school we invent a new language all our own. Sometimes it is slang or bad use of language; at other times it is casual, colloquial. Then when in adult company we let slip words like 'I'd like to go there, yaar' or 'It bugs me so', 'How b-o-r-i-n-g I say', and so on. You would of course know many more such expressions! Adults who hear you get worried about you.

What about your own use of language? Have you observed how you converse with people? How sensitive are you? Is your conversation polite, respectful and courteous? Can you make conversation easily and naturally? Do you tend to so have you asked yourself why this should be so? Do you have an open mind, ready to see the other person's point of view? Would you like to learn the art of conversation when you are in the midst of a conversation would you pause and watch yourself?

8. The Joy of Sharing

As Aslam and his best friend Arjun walked home from school that evening you could see that they had been deeply moved by the talk given by the lady from the organisation called 'School on Wheels'. They had discussed with great excitement what they heard and by the time they reached home they had resolved that they would join the movement as volunteers.

The lady who had come that afternoon to their school had pointed out the woeful conditions faced by the poor in the city and wondered if the boys and girls studying in this school had any idea of the hard lives the poor had to lead. She described with great feeling the lot of the construction workers in the city, that is, those labourers, men and women, who worked for contractors at building sites, offices, workshops, etc. These labourers came from distant towns to the city to eke out a living. They were on daily wages which meant that if they did not go to work on a certain day due to illness; they had to go without their wage for that day. The men did most of the skilled work like masonry, carpentry, welding, fitting, etc., while their womenfolk carried bricks, cement, earth and the tiles needed for construction. Their children who moved with them from place to place had no proper schooling. They played around, fought with each other or helped their parents in little ways. It was tragic she said to see bright-eyed children, who ought to be in school, looking bedraggled and dirty. That is the reason some people organised themselves with the help of volunteers and started a movement to give education to these children. It had started in a small way a few years earlier but had gradually gained in popularity. They had started with classes for children during the day in one of the buildings and they used improvised materials. Gradually their fathers and mothers also became interested and there was a demand for a proper school for them. It

was for this purpose this lady was going around asking for volunteers among teachers and senior students of various schools.

Having heard all this, Aslam and Arjun determined to offer help. The following Saturday after school was over, they asked their mothers' permission and set out to meet this lady at the address she had given. On reaching there, they were delighted to find their geography teacher, Mr. Mathew, also present. They were taken round the improvised 'school' and Aslam and Arjun could hardly believe all they saw and heard. Seated on the floor with slates in their hands or old notebooks, there were about forty children in one room huddled together, of ages ranging from three to twelve years but they were very attentive and eager to learn, Mr. Mathew who was a competent and dedicated teacher took some children out and helped them with art. Arjun joined him. Aslam started teaching arithmetic to a group of boys in one corner. They had been there for three hours, but time fled. When they returned home there was a glow of satisfaction on their faces for this was their first encounter with the less fortunate. It felt so good to share and give of what they knew. They learnt to await each Saturday. It soon became the most important day of their week. So involved were they in the lives of these children that they began to plan ways of enriching the lives of the children in other directions. They discussed their plan during the week with Mr. Mathew and sought the permission of the Principal to talk to the other students in the Assembly about what they were doing and about the needs of poor children. As a result of this, they collected clothes and money which with great feeling they presented on 26 January to the children they were teaching. With the money, they had bought sweets and some small gifts for the children. They had also taken with them a number of other senior children who taught them songs and games on that day. The children learnt what sharing means. It means not only giving one's money, clothes, books and other things to those who need it more than us, but also giving one's time and energy and affection to others because you want to see them also happy.

Isn't it strange but true that we act with a sense of urgency only when we are deeply moved? Although we see so much of poverty around us daily, we seem to take it for granted that such is the lot of the poor. Sometimes we prefer not to look at suffering. But isn't it part of education when we are young to feel this concern for society and its great burdens? Is education merely a matter of passing exams, getting degrees and jobs and settling down without a thought about the people around us, or must it include a concern for all life, the poor and the sorrowing, the crippled, the beggar and the disadvantaged? Think on these things and find out how school education can be broadened to include such concerns.

Have you had the opportunity to care for people who are less fortunate than you? Can you discuss the ways in which each of us can contribute to enrich other people's lives?

9. On Competition

Mrs. Uma Shankar, an experienced teacher in a reputed school, received a letter from her best friend, Zubeida, and as it raised interesting questions she shared it with her class. It ran as follows:

Dear Uma,

I want to share with you one incident that has made me very unhappy and about which I want your opinion. As you know, my daughter Hameeda, who is just six, goes to school now. The other day there was an art competition at her school. Perhaps, mothers were expected to train their children at home. I didn't, but on the morning of the competition I sent her to school with some paper and crayon. Hameeda left home looking very gay and happy. She returned home in tears, quite broken-hearted and sobbed inconsolably. She was bitterly disappointed that she had received no prize unlike some of her friends. She could not understand why this had happened as they had all done the same thing — drawn pictures on paper! After I had pacified her and bought her a little gift and reassured her that her painting was beautiful she seemed a bit soothed. It hurt me to see a little child of six, so pained for no fault of hers. As I tucked her into bed at night my little Hameeda asked "Ma, today I did less well, didn't I? Dhruv did better than me, isn't that so?" Such a question from a six-year-old did come as a shock!

The whole incident left me furious and puzzled. I was naturally very distressed at my daughter's unhappiness and I was worried about her loss of self-confidence. I feared that feelings of inferiority and failure might forever be instilled into her little mind even from this tender age. On the following day, I gently told her teacher that they could have spared the children all this pain and frustration if they had only skipped the competition and allowed the children to draw or paint, which is such a beautiful thing to do. The answer was: "But surely the good ones should receive some encouragement".

Tell me, Uma how important and integral to learning is competition? Must we applaud excellence and punish mediocrity to make children learn? All this grading and ranking and prize-giving that we have in our schools, are they necessary? Can't children learn easily, happily without comparing themselves with others and competing hard against everyone else, as if, somehow, their success depended upon some else's failure? Must learning be so cruel? Do write to me soon.

Yours affectionately,
(Zubeida.)

Many of us have had such experiences, haven't we, of feeling highly elated and thrilled on being praised and rewarded and also of sinking into dejection at not succeeding or at being ranked low?

Some people feel that organising various competitions and spurring children on to do better each time, competing with everyone else is a good thing, for it makes children tough and when they grow up they can compete with the same spirit and make it to the top as the most successful people in the world. Others feel equally strongly that encouraging competition at school by giving marks, grades, ranks and by organising various competitive situations destroys something beautiful in the child. Comparing one child's ability with another's and constantly motivating one to beat the other, is being violent to the inner being of the child by sowing seeds of jealousy and hurt. Would it not be right that instead of training pupils to be tough and competitive when they grow up, we helped them to become so intelligent that they would refuse to compete and bring more discord into the world? Because the best in them has been nurtured they would flower and help others do so. Therefore, should we not let them learn at school with a

sense of freedom and without the pressures of comparison and competition? That is why Zubeida asks that question in her letter to Uma:

“Must we applaud excellence and punish mediocrity to make children learn?” It prompted Uma to hold a spirited discussion in class that day and most of the children confessed that comparison did hurt them and was not necessary or desirable.

Wilt you also give this question serious thought? Discuss it in class or with your friends.

Do you remember any situation when you specially needed reassurance and kindly appreciation?

Do you think competition results in discouragement and fault-finding?

10. On Relationship

There was a general grumbling session on and they were talking about their teachers — some nine or ten students sitting by a lovely lotus pond. None of them watched the goldfish in the waters, for their eyes and ears and minds were on the conversation. They were discussing their teachers. Their feeling was that a teacher who develops a prejudice against a student never drops it. However hard you tried, it was always the same story; the same distant look, the same harshness in the voice, the same remark in the notebook. They may talk of not having fixed opinions, but the students’ experience was different. If they liked you, you could do no wrong; otherwise you were always in the wrong. “Teachers are very partial,” they argued.

One of the girls said, “I don’t like them generally, because most of them are so narrow-minded, conservative”, using haltingly the latest word she had learnt in class. “Look! What is the point of having a co-educational school, if girls can’t talk to boys or boys can’t talk to girls? We have to sit separately, eat separately, and read separately. The other day, Saleem and I were together looking at the Encyclopaedia in the library to find out all about dolphins and there was Miss X giving me a nasty look. I wished I could have gone under the sea myself.”

They conceded that there were exceptions and some of the teachers were wonderful people but in a large school like theirs, the verdict was that most teachers cannot be loved. Teachers are to be feared and obeyed.

In another corner of the school, correcting notebooks of various classes was a group of teachers discussing students. They felt that students were no longer eager to learn, no longer hard working and innocent as in their days. “They are a bunch of lazy, good-for-nothing kids,” they grumbled. Gone are the days when you saw their eyes shine in class with understanding, when hands would be raised before they answered, when all their work was neat and tidy; (something has gone wrong today. There may be exceptions but, on the whole, (students are not interested in their studies. They are too distracted. Perhaps it is because of the cinema or the radio or the television. Their minds have become restless. They are pleasure-seeking. They are bored with everything except those things that arouse their sensations. “Their parents are to blame,” they said,” Do you think parents have any time for children these days?” they argued.

Yet another teacher said, “I don’t mind their being pleasure-loving or even lazy but they are so arrogant these days. They no longer show any respect. They come to school because they have to. The other day one of the boys answered me so rudely that I could have punished him. I feel children should be dealt with very firmly”. As this teacher spoke you could tell from his face and his voice that he was smarting under a hurt.

In yet another corner little Tejas who was a shy boy and his group of friends were discussing in quiet whispers how to deal with Rakesh, the bully of the class. They were all dead scared of him, for he acted smart and made them run errands for him, teased them and even beat up little Tejas once. Of course no one ever mentioned these things to teachers, for that is never done. Boys who sometimes complain out of desperation are called “sneaks” by the rest. One could tell that relationships at school were all very strained and tense. On the same day some parents had gathered together in Mr. Sharma’s house. Their children studied in the same school. They wanted to request the Principal to call for a parent-teacher meeting. They were concerned about the fall in the standard of the school. One mother said that her boy, who was so bright the previous school and had brought home such good reports, had deteriorated sadly in every subject. She felt the teachers should be stricter with the students and extract more work. Another disagreed and said she thought they were giving the children too much work and wished they were kinder, not stricter. A father bemoaned the teachers did not teach children any manners these days. Yet another mother remarked that her child was learning to use bad language and wondered from where he was picking it up.

Of course, some parents did say that a teacher’s life was becoming very tough these days for various reasons. As one mother put it, ‘I find it impossible to relate to even one child and make him understand things. How can we expect a teacher to look after forty children,’ and so on. But from their conversation that morning, you could tell that parents demand a lot from teachers and from their own children and have their own notions of what a school should be. There is very little understanding between home and school. In fact teachers have hardly any relationship with parents.

Have you thought about your own relationship with your teachers? Is it based largely on fear, or do you feel free to talk to some of them? Do you realise that if we did not have fixed notions about each other we could relate better and that good relationship is essential for learning?

What is your relationship with your parents? Of course you will say you love them and they love you, but do you feel unafraid and free to tell them everything about yourself so that you don’t hide anything from them? Have you ever been hurt by them or by conflicts with them? How are you related to your classmates? Does anyone bully you? Are you very shy by nature? Why should you, allow anyone to bully you? Can you not be strong yourself?

Relationship between people is such a delicate thing, isn’t it? It is like a flower. You have to tend it, not trample on it for if you trample on it, it will die. Building a relationship requires, does it not, consideration for the other person. People who are all the time concerned about their own little satisfactions and pleasure show very little consideration to others. That is a sad thing.

And so, if you become aware of all this when you are young, you can reach out to people more easily as you grow up.

Do you believe that what you think of yourself is more important than what others think of you? Would you like to take up the criticisms in this essay and examine them objectively?

11. Leisure

The school was to close for the next two weeks for it was Diwali time and the students were looking forward to it, all excited. Their faces were aglow with joy. To think that they did not have to get up early and get dressed and rush to the bus stop! To feel that they could take their home-work leisurely, without the daily fear of the teacher's demands! To be able to do what one liked and just feel free and easy! That's what a holiday means to most students.

That day, at school they exchanged notes in an animated fashion about how they would spend their holidays. They had all kinds of ideas and interests: going for picnics, seeing at least six films, going to the circus that was coming to town, visiting relations and looking for interesting things to eat, watching TV or video, travelling and so on. Many were excited about the types of crackers they would collect and burn during Diwali. Then there were others who had a variety of hobbies and wanted time to pursue them: stamp collection, coin collection, music, particularly the *sitar* or *tabla*, violin or *mridangam*, photography, cooking, gardening. Some children said they would like to spend their leisure learning new things not taught at school, like a new language or dance or weaving or embroidery. They were keen on doing something creative. Very few said they would like to read story books. In fact this school was in a big town and television was available and so slowly, students were getting out of the reading habit. It was greater fun seeing things directly on a screen. It gave immediate satisfaction and pleasure. In smaller towns where no television was available, there were any number of cinema houses jutting out of street corners claiming attention in a loud manner. You could buy fun!

Does anything strike you about the ways these boys and girls were planning to spend their holidays? Are you different from them? How do you like to spend your leisure? Are adults different from young people in this? Have you noticed how they 'spend' their vacations or week-ends? First of all, we normally choose what we like to do and avoid that which we don't like, that which does not give pleasure. Secondly, the senses and the mind which depend on entertainment seem to demand more and more new forms of entertainment. Boredom sets in if you had to do the same thing over and over again unless you did it naturally because it is a hobby and you like to do it; so if you don't have a hobby you seek variety even in entertainment.

Do you notice that such a constant seeking for different forms of pleasure can make you dependent on outward things to keep you happy? As a result, with too many distractions, the body and mind get more and more restless and often we don't have a good night's sleep. All energy seems to have sapped. This is what the psychologists say. Find out next time for yourself whether it is true. Observe how you like to spend your free time; see whether you are dependent on different forms of entertainment to give you some hours of fun. Of course, fun and laughter are good things and one must have a lot of

them but can one have fun even while doing maths or physics, history or geography? Can one be happy helping mother or a friend in trouble? Can one look after a plant or a garden most naturally and be happy? Think upon these things. How necessary are outward forms of entertainment for inward happiness? Does interest lie without or within? How can one discover one's own interests? At what age do you think interests are formed?

Also consider the other question. What is energy? What are things that dissipate your energy? Do you know what 'dissipate' means? It means the wasting of energy. For example, observe how your body feels and what is the state of your mind after you have seen a commercial film, full of action, of violence. Is there a difference between that state and the way you feel when you are fresh in the morning after a night's rest? Is it true to say that too much of entertainment can dissipate energy?

If that is so, how can you 'conserve' energy? Not by denying yourself all entertainment. That would be silly: but, perhaps, by choosing a form of entertainment that refreshes makes you feel joyous. Also, do you ever like to be alone by yourself just watching nature - the sky or the birds or trees, not asking for pleasure. Try it sometime. It might give you a lot of joy.

12. On People and Their Ways

Arun was asked to escort his *masi* back to her home which was about two hours from their town by train. Arun felt absolutely elated, for that meant that he had grown up. He went to the station on his bicycle and bought two second class tickets and also got the seats reserved. He put them carefully into a small new wallet his mother had given him and came home. Revati *masi* who was his favourite aunt had come to spend about a week at her sister's place because she was lonely in her own home. Her eldest son was married and had gone to another city where he was employed. Her daughter was studying to be a doctor and was doing her house-surgeonship that year and so she was staying in the hospital and came home very rarely. Masi stayed with her younger son and daughter-in-law, Sarika, with whom unfortunately she had problems of relationship. Sarika was a bright, sprightly girl but *man* considered her too 'modern'. Whenever she came to her sister's house, Revati *masi* would narrate incident after incident to prove that modern girls were very selfish, pleasure-loving, arrogant, and her sister would console her. Strange isn't it, how we base our opinions about people on incidents of daily life, on people's conscious and unconscious behaviour? Day after day, these incidents accumulate and the opinions get fixed and we form our own images of people. So Revati *masi* had one image of her daughter-in-law and that young lady must have carried her own image of her mother-in-law — how old fashioned she was how possessive of her son, and so on. The son was in a dilemma for he was fond of his mother and his wife. On most days he pretended to be deaf and this instigated the two ladies. Life is like that, full of inner conflicts and man-made problems. It might have helped if they had talked things over, but they didn't.

At any rate, Arun was happy that he could make a trip with his aunt, may be for a day and return. He took a set of clothes neatly arranged and a small bag with his soap, toothbrush, etc. Once in the compartment, he acted very responsibly and saw to it that his

aunt was comfortable. Then he started looking around and observing the people around him. "It takes all kinds to make the world", his father had once said and he hadn't quite grasped the meaning of that sentence at the time, but now, things were beginning to be clear. Each person was so different from the other. There was a woman who was very kind and attentive to her child and another who scolded her boy for every little act of curiosity; there was the old man with a cheroot who had kindly twinkling eyes and a harsh looking bloke in the corner with a fixed scowl. Then within minutes Arun overheard an argument. Four men were settling matters with the ticket collector by offering him a bribe in order to get their berths for the night. They had a long distance to travel and had no reservations. The bribe was given quietly and taken quietly after the noisy discussion. Arun had his ears tuned to their conversation for it was the first time he was actually seeing grown-ups behave in this manner.

Away, in another corner of the large compartment another group of men and women were sitting in judgement on the fallen standards of the country. They complained about what it had come to! Cities were being spoiled by high-rise buildings. "Nobody cares", they groaned. Forests were being cut by greedy contractors; everything was becoming costly. The topic changed to the impossibility of getting admissions into any professional college like engineering or medical purely on merit. So on and on it went, the droning voices of complaint. So engrossed were they in what each one had to say and they talked so loudly, they never bothered about being considerate to the people around them. They never considered the little child which was trying to sleep, the young couple who were just starting their new life, the bright young student who had his book close to his chest and was trying to concentrate on the printed matter. This happens very often doesn't it? We are constantly speaking critically about the happenings in our country without a thought about what is happening around us; and isn't there something we can do ourselves to stop the wrong things that are going on in our country without always blaming other people for it?

We are also part of the country, aren't we? Arun observed all this and was quite amazed.

He looked out. They had arrived at a station. There was the usual clutter of cups and glasses. Tea and snacks were being served by hawkers and railway men. He loved looking out of the window, watching the curious assortment of strange people — rich, poor, very poor; tall, short; fat, thin; brown, black, fair and so on- There was an interesting group at the water tap, all with their bottles trying to fill water and all eager to get to the tap first, jostling, pushing. Each person acted as if his need was the greatest. The young boy standing timidly in one corner would have been left out if an elderly woman hadn't helped him fill his bottle. "In small things and big, people act without thought of others" thought Arun. Consideration is a beautiful quality. It comes, as you learn to observe how inconsiderate people including yourself are, and immediately there is an understanding and a change. Try it some time.

At the next station a group of boys and girls entered the compartment. They were from the University and they were agitated and debating loudly as to whether it was right for the Vice-Chancellor to close down the University and turn them out of the hostel. There had been a strike of some sort by a section of students. These students who entered the compartment were not a party to the strike. They appeared to be serious about their

studies and they were angry that their exams would be delayed just because of a handful of wrong-doers. They were full of spirit and it seemed as if the whole compartment was drawn to them. Arun looked at them with wonder and respect.

When they alighted at their home station, Arun felt he had enjoyed the trip immensely just observing the different kinds of people he had come across. He was very silent and pensive as he walked home with his aunt. The impact was great.

People are so different; and yet, do you notice points of similarity? What does each one basically want? Are we different underneath the skin, as it were? Or do you notice some common trend in all of us? Find out for yourself.

13. School Day

There was a lot of excitement for about a month before the School Day when parents and friends of the school were to share in the joy of an evening of entertainment. It was also the day when merit cards were distributed to all the children in the school who had achieved 65 percent and above in a subject or had gained merit in games, music, arts, debates, drama, and hobbies. In this particular school, they did not give prizes only to the first three pupils of a class. They wanted as many children as possible to be rewarded for effort or talent; as a result, there was less competition and more participation on the part of children. The pupils were all looking forward to the School Day.

The teachers who usually drew up the programmes to be presented had decided on three main items involving the majority of the children. There was to be a historical skit in English depicting an episode in the Life of Queen Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Raleigh; a pageant in Hindi bringing scenes from India's freedom struggle around the item of the Salt Satyagraha when Gandhiji led the famous Dandi March — this was written by the pupils of class VIII, after they had studied about it in class and it was completely improvised; there were also several folk dances depicting the coming of the rains and the joy with which it was welcomed in Bengal, Punjab, Kashmir, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Orissa, and so on. The songs were selected with care and the dances prepared in typical folk style with a lot of attention to the authenticity of the costumes.

One hour had been allotted at the end of each day for rehearsals but the children took so long to assemble that Miss Chitra Gokhale who was in over-all charge had an enormous burden which a lesser person would have given up. But she had grit and controlled the whole exercise, allotting different venues and teachers for each item. Yet, a persistent problem the school faced was the lack of a sense of punctuality in most children. It was as if the children felt so free after classes were over, that it took them some time to let off steam and collect themselves together again. So, the students' council was asked to discuss it among themselves and take the responsibility for getting rehearsals started on time. As the day drew nearer, of course everybody became more serious. Isn't it true that we seem to need a challenge to make us serious and responsible?

On School Day, back stage, there were a whole lot of emotions on display: nervousness, excitement, jealousy, frustration, anger, cooperation and team work. Teachers and parents were doing the make-up. The 'queen' looked so gorgeous that the little maid who had to wear simple clothes was a little jealous. There was a search for folk jewellery and flowers among those doing the folk dances. Everyone wanted to look

nice. Teachers had a hard time controlling the various moods and emotions of the children, but, on the whole, the spirit of joy and expectancy was infectious and as each character came out transformed, there were loud claps of appreciation. The green-room seemed to be a mini stage where life's drama was enacted year after successful year.

The scene in the *pandal* was different. Some teachers and pupils were arranging chairs and seeing if the *view* from each angle was alright. The Principal was moving about looking into the details of the seating arrangements, the position of the volunteers, the microphones and *so on*.

Ten minutes before the time indicated on the invitation, the Principal and teachers and senior students were at the gate, ready to receive the guests, feeling proud of their school. The chief guest and his lady arrived, happy to be invited by a school, happy to relive their own childhood and forget the political worries of the day. After the invocation, a pupil spoke hospitable words of welcome and then the function started dead on time. The stage was a simple affair with only a backdrop of navy blue cloth and a few improvised sets which the children themselves could easily remove. This was a progressive school that gave more importance to children's acting and participation than dead furniture and patterned sets.

The English play was very good. At one stage, the teacher who directed it, feared that the queen may not know how to carry the large, round, hooked skirt she was wearing, Elizabethan style, and her heart missed a beat, but the queen carried herself so well, she might have been Queen Elizabeth herself! Children usually have a way of rising to the occasion. It is the training period that is difficult, when they give you a hard lime.

The Salt Satyagraha scene was moving and brought tears to the eyes of the young and the old in the audience. The boy who acted the Mahatma's part looked every inch like Gandhiji. He had seen Attenborough's film on Gandhi thrice to make sure he got all the finer points of Gandhiji's walk, expression, smile, bend, dress and all. He was the best boy in the school and took his part very seriously. The words were simple and direct because they were written by the children and so the whole pageant was very natural, each child doing his part with a great deal of understanding and emotion. There were about eighty students taking part. The music was also beautiful. The audience was deeply moved. Parents craned their necks to spot their loved ones in each item. School Day is an important day for parents and they love it. They recognised other children as well, as they remembered little anecdotes their little ones had related at home.

Then came the folk dances, bringing a fresh breeze as it were into the *pandal*. The gay abandon of the dances as they rejoiced at the coming of the rains was infectious and there were happy smiles on the faces of the audience. In fact there had been a severe drought for two successive years in that town and so young and old yearned for the fresh downpour of the welcome rain. The songs were in different Indian languages and they had been learnt with great attention paid to correct pronunciation and intonation in Marathi, Bengali, Malayalam and other regional languages. How simple it is to learn the languages of India and how wonderful it is to be able to speak them. Each language is so rich and beautiful, with a cadence all its own. This raises a question in the mind — why do we make things complex by fighting over which language children should learn at school and which they should not?

The entire evening and all the items were a roaring success. Backstage there was a lot of hugging among pupils. The teachers were relieved and were happily tired.

In the *pandal* the Chief Guest was led to the dais. He made a very thoughtful speech congratulating the children and asking them to prepare themselves while at school, for a life of promise, excitement and discovery. The lady gave away merit cards which had all been arranged meticulously on the table with proper ribbons and labels by Miss Gokhale who had served the school for thirty years. There was perfect silence in the *pandal*. It was obvious that the children of this school had learnt to listen and were very respectful. The Principal thanked everybody. She was particular about saying a good word for the children, the teachers and the workers. It was a wonderful experience for the school as a whole — an emotion-packed experience.

Do you realise what a range of emotions are involved on School Day and how we all behave a little foolishly at times? Do you notice how other days are so ordinary? Why is that so? Think about it.

Are you familiar with the story of our country's struggle for freedom from British rule? It is a wonderful story now in the pages of history. Read about it, discuss it and learn about what the human spirit can do when roused by a tremendous force to a collective aspiration for freedom from slavery.

Give thought also to the learning of languages. How many do you know? Wouldn't it be fun to be able to speak several? Would you like to devote some time to learning to speak the language of another State in the country so that you can travel there and feel one with the people there? You can then learn to read simple books and perhaps, if you are good at it, some of the literature too. If you live in the north try to learn good Hindi and a south Indian language like Tamil which is one of the most ancient languages in the world and is rich in literature. Or, you could learn Kannada, Telugu or Malayalam. If you are from the south, make an effort to learn Bengali, or Oriya, or Assamese apart from Hindi - you can then bring the whole country together emotionally. A country's wealth is her languages, her literature, her culture, her spirit. Do you agree?

Think about Annual Day at your school. Do you find similarities?

14. On Getting Hurt

Let us examine several situations at school and at home that hurt pupils and make them unhappy because of that hurt.

The most common is, of course, the instant when you get a good scolding from your teacher. You have probably done something wrong, in spite of her telling you gently many times and then she decides to deal with you firmly. If you realise that she is right, you feel less hurt, although you wish she had not shouted at you in the presence of other pupils! If you are intelligent you will not repeat the mistake or carry the hurt with you. You see her point and say "sorry" and leave it at that. But if you are not intelligent and you take her words to heart, you sulk and withdraw and you try various ways of justifying yourself, or of suppressing your anger, or you react and hurt someone else in turn. This is very unintelligent because you will only hurt yourself further.

Another situation that causes hurt is when you are compared with a student who is brighter or cleverer than you. Do you agree? It may be mother or father at home who constantly ask you why you can't get marks as high as your classmate. They don't realise, unfortunately, how much that hurts you, but imagine their remarks will make you fare better the next time. But you feel bad and gradually, unless you care for your friend deeply, you may become unfriendly with him! Similarly, sometimes in class too, teachers compare students and rank them as 'Very Good' or 'Average' or 'Poor'. That is why when the progress report is prepared, have you noticed how secretive you are and unless you have done extremely well in the tests, you don't like to show the report to any one? You hide it and are even afraid to show it to your parents. What does that indicate? That you do not want to get hurt further and as a result do everything to save your reputation in class. You see, we care so much about what other people think of us, that we always want them to think highly of us. Only with friends can we share our True picture of ourselves. That is the reason why, sometimes, when your classmates burst out laughing upon you're giving a stupid answer you feel hurt. If you are not a sportsman or if you are not intelligent you will keep all these feelings of hurt inside you bottled up and perhaps plan secretly how to take revenge on the boys you don't like! One hurl leads to another and to another and another and so on.

Teasing each other at school starts as fun but sometimes ends up in a serious brawl. You all have nicknames for each other, don't you? Fatso, Cadbury, Lumboboo, Tube light, Golguppa, Cry-Baby, and so on. You don't usually mind it, but sometimes when you are not in the mood and the other fellow is not sensitive enough to notice that you are serious, he teases you at the wrong time and you come to blows. Perhaps your mother was angry with you that morning or your teacher, or you were worried about something else but this fellow continued to irritate you and you gave vent to all the anger inside you and beat him up. This is common and sad. Next time, observe your friend's moods, be sensitive to his feelings so that you don't hurt him by teasing him out of all proportion. One can have innocent fun but it should not lead to another's distress. Have you seen movies with Charlie Chaplin or Laurel and Hardy or Johnny Walker? Well, there are many situations that provoke a lot of innocent laughter, but you would have noticed that the moment the fun begins to hurt another, we stop laughing, the audience is quiet and our sympathies are with the man who is hurt.

Similarly, in some schools where boys and girls study together, boys tease girls and girls tease boys, or if a girl is seen talking to a boy, other girls will tease her. Why does this happen? Is it not natural for girls and boys to talk to each other, share books, read and play together? Sometimes- unfortunately, it could be the fault of elders, teachers or parents, who think that boys and girls should live and learn in different compartments, and so when you grow slightly bigger they begin to warn you and an uneasy climate prevails at school. It all starts as a joke in a very small way but soon the person who is teased gets very hurt and feels miserable. These results in unnatural relationships and boys learn to gang up with boys and girls with girls. What shall we do about this situation?

What else hurts you? We have referred to scolding by teachers, the behaviour of classmates, comparisons that are unhealthy for you teasing, and the pattern of behaviour of boys and girls as some examples. You can think of many more because you would

know best what your hurts are at this age. Find out some more situations and discuss them with your teachers.

The next question is how to stop getting hurt. Consider what happens to you when you are hurt. Sometimes one does not mind physical hurt so much as mental pain. What happens to you when you are compared or teased? It rankles in the mind and the same words come to the surface of the mind again and again; you withdraw and lose interest in all things; or you take revenge and become aggressive. You can observe these in yourself if you watch yourself the next time you are hurt. In fact human beings get hurt all the time, young and old alike. The same thing happens to grown-ups also. Since it is not possible to change other people, we have to understand our own hurts, how they start, how they develop and simmer and cause further hurt and see if it is possible not to get hurt in the first place. That requires an alert mind that is always watchful.

So can we start learning how not to get hurt even when we are young?

15. Meeting a Challenge

This is a true story, the story of the determination of a young girl. Saraswati at her father who had been working as a shop assistant just when she was, the twelfth class and her brother, Lakshman, was in the eighth. The family as overcome with grief. Her mother was dazed. It looked as if life had come to a stop for them with the only earning member in the family gone. Saraswati knew that she had to do something. She made up her mind and started looking for a job, any job. Through her headmistress she got the position of an *ayah* a lady's house and took it up. As her school had morning hours, beginning 6.30 and ending by 12.00 p.m she was able to report for work by 12.30 p.m. Her employer was kind and understanding as Saraswati was a student. Saraswati loved looking after the baby and was such a help to the lady that was almost a member of that family. She had a very loving nature and was very careful and attentive about her work in the house. She got a meagre salary but her mother supplemented the income by making and selling *papads* and pickles. They moved to a smaller house, in the same little town, which had just one room and no water facilities. They managed bravely and when Saraswati returned home at about nine in the night she was tired. Her mother would wait for her return and they would share together their simple meal while Saraswati told her all about her school and about the doings of the baby that lay. Then she would do her homework and study for her twelfth standard exam, was hard work indeed, but she got her energy from somewhere. Her brother Lakshman continued with his eighth class and studied moderately well. He wasn't sensitive to what his sister was going through but he was not a problem in any way. On the contrary, he helped his mother, running household errands and selling the *papads* and pickles to old friends.

Soon Saraswati passed her twelfth class exam with credit and with the help of the lady for whom she worked, was able to get a job as telephone operator! Her worst days were over and she got a better salary. Yet, it meant long hours of work and the learning of new skills. Soon, she proved so efficient, so honest and so good that one and all liked her. And what is more, in three years' time she studied for her B.A. degree privately and completed that creditably. She was now a graduate.

Always a spirited girl, she started taking interest in her locality and the needs of the poor people. She would go to a blind school when she was free and read to them. She wrote articles about injustices in society, the callousness of citizens and sent them to newspapers. She was already leading a full life — and quietly studying for her M.A. degree.

It was then that Saraswati had another problem on her hands. Lakshman had finished his twelfth class exam getting an aggregate of 72%. Both mother and Saraswati were happy, but where he should go next worried them. The boy, of course, wanted to enter the Science College and study for his B.Sc. Yet, after seeing so many unemployed graduates around her, Saraswati felt that she had to find some other avenue which would equip him for a job. She consulted friends, who advised her to get him admitted to a Polytechnic in the city. She paid one visit to the place and she knew it was the right thing to do. There, they gave a Diploma after three years but provided a lot of practical training both in mechanical and electrical workshops. It was difficult to convince Lakshman because, like many other people, he thought a college degree was ‘superior’ and his friends were going to college, but Saraswati had a way with her. She was firm with him and yet kind. She persuaded him to visit the place and after a visit he agreed that it was worth a try because he loved working with machines. Since he had secured good marks, he got admission with a merit scholarship. Saraswati was delighted.

Within a year he realised that his decision was right, for, in the Polytechnic he learnt several skills and after the completion of the course he immediately got an apprenticeship in a firm that was manufacturing machine goods. He was an excellent mechanic and was much in demand. Our country needs mechanics, fitters, turners, electricians. It is good to remember that people

Working at a desk are in no way superior to those who work with their hands.

Saraswati had even greater dreams. She hoped that in the distant future he might be able to set up his own shop, because the government was giving loans to enterprising young men who wanted to be self-employed, and have their own little business. She would set him up, she decided.

But, in the meanwhile, she was content with her life as a telephone operator, her wider interests in society and service, her brother’s apprenticeship and the steady increase in the family income. Now they could move to a slightly bigger house. Her mother was frail but otherwise strong of heart. She stopped making *papads* and pickles for sale but she continued to make them for friends and ways enjoyed cooking a simple meal for her children. They too loved it and looked forward to having dinner together, for nothing tasted better than food cooked by mother.

Is it not true that while at school we all think we must go through college and get a degree and then look for a job? Is it also not true that college degrees do not necessarily prepare you for any specific job? There is a general feeling it is better to be a clerk in a bank than a carpenter in a shop or a repair worker.

16. Questions That Troubled Aditi

That it is better to be a clerk in a bank than a salesman of motor parts. But that is absurd, isn’t it? Every society needs workers of different kinds and if you are good at

working with your hands there is no reason why you shouldn't train to be an excellent carpenter or a horticulturist. There are institutions that give you this practical training. Remember this when you complete class twelve or even ten for you can then have a wider choice of careers

Do you know of anyone who has had to face hardships in life or have you faced difficulties yourself?

What are the qualities of mind and heart one needs at such times?

Aditi was a bright pupil in the eighth class of a government school in the city. She was full of curiosity and questions about the happenings in the country and in the world. Her father encouraged her to read the daily newspapers, both Hindi and English. She was reluctant to start reading as she felt that newspapers were more for adults than for pupils at school, but her father coaxed her and soon she found it had become a habit with her. She looked forward to the morning papers and glanced through one, before rushing off to school. As she put her mind to it more and more, many questions began to bother her about the way the world was being shaped by grown-ups.

When she got to read the newspapers she discovered that almost everyday there was some mention of accidents, burglaries, crimes and murder. These were real happenings not fairy tales. Not a day passed without some dreadful thing taking place in this country or outside. A plane hijacked, a bank looted, a train derailed, someone murdered and so on. "What a cruel world this is!" she thought. "Why is there so much violence and why should newspapers give them so much importance?" Sometimes they were even the main headlines! This bothered her.

Then, she gradually educated herself about the relationship between nations and soon came to realise that America and Russia were Super Powers because they were very highly advanced, and powerful. She discovered that both the powers were arming themselves with the latest military weapons while talking of peace. Both powers had nuclear bombs and if one were to go off a good part of the earth could be wiped out and millions of people would be killed. She shuddered to think that it was one of the most powerful countries. Then there were other wars reported between the Jews and Arabs, between Iran and Iraq and the same sad story everywhere. Nearer home, there were tensions in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and, of course, within India itself. She couldn't grasp the whole thing but as she was well informed she began to ask questions every time something serious was reported. Once she even decided she would study political science in a good University and have a thorough knowledge about the countries of the world.

Then, one day, something attracted her attention which made her turn her mind to a totally different problem. She read a gruesome report of a newly married bride being burnt to death by her husband and his family because she had not brought sufficient dowry. Her father had provided the couple with a large sum of money and many other useful household articles but she had not brought things like a scooter and a refrigerator and she was nagged every day about it! Of course, the husband reported she had committed suicide but the neighbours stoutly maintained that it was murder. A case had been registered. Aditi was horrified that such things could happen to young girls and asked her mother and teachers how this dowry system became so dreadful an evil in society, "Why should girls be considered inferior to boys?" she asked in rage "Why have

men to be tempted with money before they agreed to marry? Why does the government allow this horrid system to go on?" she enquired. She then learnt that legislation had been passed banning the giving or receiving of dowry but the practice still continued in secret. She found out that there were many women's organisations that were fighting against the dowry system and attempting to awaken the minds of people. Once, she chanced upon an advertisement in the newspapers appealing for donations for a women's organisation which was doing good social work. Aditi was moved and she immediately took out from her piggy-bank the fifteen rupees that she had saved, went to the post-office, filled out a money order from and mailed the money to the Secretary of the organisation. She felt good 'inside' after that. It is true, isn't it, that it is only when we have real concern for something, a genuine feeling about something that we act? Can you think of instances in your life when you have acted upon feeling very strongly about something?

Next, Aditi started finding out whatever information she could get about girls and women, both from newspapers and magazines and from uncles and aunts she talked to. She discovered that far more boys than girls were going to school, particularly in villages. Many people still considered a boy an asset and a girl a liability to the family. Girls did a great deal of work, from even five years of age, with the mother in the fields gathering fire-wood, sweeping floors, drawing water from the wells, caring for baby brother or sister and so on. That is why they could not go to school, and even if they did for a few months, they dropped out because there was work at home. Their mothers had to work on the farms too along with the father. That is the lot of our poor, especially the poor farmers who comprise the vast majority of our population. Aditi's question was: "Hasn't every girl a right to education and how can we give it to her?"

Once she attended a women's meeting with her aunt who was also interested in such things and found them discussing the status of women in society and how, in spite of the fact that Indian women had progressed very well in various professions and one of them had even risen to be the Prime Minister of the country, generally, women had less voice than men in all decisions about the home, the education of children, their future and so on, or even in society. Women workers in factories and cities were paid less wages than men for the same work. Several cases of injustice were brought to light at that meeting.

So involved was Aditi that her mother had to remind her that she was still a pupil at school and so had to wait a few years, till she had completed her education in the University before taking active part in social work. "Use this time to prepare yourself," she said. "Find out as much as you can and be ready to play your part, when the time comes," she advised.

Do you feel strongly about any of the things happening in our country or in the world? **Have** you the correct facts? Try to get the correct information about social injustice, about poverty and illiteracy, about ill health and minds alive with questions concerning them.

17. On Money

Mohan's father was in the Merchant Navy. His task was to sail across the oceans for about twenty days in a month or sometimes for two or three months at a stretch, carrying merchandise for companies that were trading with other countries. Mr. Singh liked his

job. In fact, since his school days, ever since he had read stories of Marco Polo, Vasco Da Gama and other great explorers he had wanted to become a sailor and live his life on the seas. The only thing he missed, as he grew older, was his family. He had a son Mohan, a daughter Usha, and there was, of course, his wife Irawati. He would, however, write to each of them regularly. His son, Mohan, was like him in many ways, restless, adventurous, full of spirit and mischief. He was intelligent but needed constant guidance. So his father started writing a series of letters to him. In the latest letter he was answering Mohan's question: "What is wrong with working for more and more money? Money gives power and power gives position in society. Rich people enjoy their wealth and do not suffer at all. Father, why do some people say 'money is evil'? What is wrong with it?" Mohan had written a forceful letter after a discussion with his best friend, Tahir, and they both awaited Mohan's father's answers to their queries. This was the reply Mohan received.

My dearest son,

I was most happy to see your letter awaiting me when our ship reached Southampton and I read and re-read it. I am so happy that my little boy and Tahir are discussing such important matters and are beginning to question things. Let me try to answer your question on what is wrong in the search for more and more money. Let us not start with a dogmatic statement that it is wrong or right. Let us investigate. Let us enquire.

Now, why does man need money at all? The answer is clear. Man needs money for his living. He needs a house to shelter him from the sun and the rain, for he can't live on the streets. He needs food and the money to procure it. Otherwise he would starve.

He needs decent, comfortable clothes. If he has a family he needs money to educate his children, buy their books and notebooks, etc. If he has to look after his own father and mother he needs a little more money so that he can keep them comfortable. In the present set-up, with so much pollution around and consequently, curious and baffling diseases and epidemics on the increase, we are always falling ill, so we need money to pay the doctor's fees and buy medicines. Money is also needed for going from one place to another, in the same city or outside. Further, man needs some relaxation and he also uses money to go to a cinema occasionally or buy a radio. These seem to be some of his daily necessities — food, clothes, shelter, transportation, medicine, recreation and so on. A simple man like a clerk or a factory worker or a salesman earns what may seem like a small sum of money but he uses it wisely and is more or less content.

But the trouble starts, when he compares himself with others who have larger houses, better food, more expensive clothes, large cars and several forms of entertainment in their homes or clubs. It is true that common people do not have money to spend on trifling forms of entertainment or pleasure. It is also true that common people often feel jealous of the others. It is at this point that the race starts: they begin to imagine how wonderful it would be if their children also had the latest television set, the latest toys and so on, with the list growing longer and longer! They become dissatisfied with the simple work they are doing. They no longer experience the joy of the simple things in life. They aspire to become managers and bosses. They want to climb the ladder of success because they think more and more success will bring more and more money and with it will follow position or power. That is how society becomes competitive with people striving to beat or outwit each other, as in a game, always wanting to win, feeling thrilled when they get

what they want and very disappointed and frustrated when they don't succeed. This desire for more and more things is limitless because mankind is inventing more and more things — better cars, better refrigerators, better machines, better comforts, more and subtler forms of entertainment and man will go on inventing them. So, there is no end to this desire for 'more'. Do you see this?

Therefore, let us take the poor clerk as an example. When he started working, he was perhaps contented with a little money. He was perhaps trying to save. He looked after his father and mother and kept people around him happy. Sometimes he would bring a small gift home, for, at that stage people were more important than things. If they were free in the evening, they would go for walks or to the park. They would tell stories and share jokes. They would look at the sky and the trees and the birds and feel themselves a part of nature. There was time for work and time to be happy together. Even at work there were less problems because the mind was not always obsessed with the wanting to become the 'Manager'. He paid attention to every detail and did a good job. This made him feel satisfied at the end of the day. It is easy to imagine how one feels when something has been accomplished.

Then gradually as he began to chase money and power and be like the others he became more and more aggressive and angry because unless he pushed himself he could not get what he wanted. So ambition, love of money and the things that money can buy and the feeling of power that it gives became important to him. Yet, strangely, instead of that bringing more joy to the family he noticed that there were more quarrels, more dissatisfaction, more misunderstanding. His wife and he who were basically simple people and good friends earlier, hardly spoke to each other. She was busy shopping and going to meetings or parties. She neglected her children for they were left with servants. Concern for each other and affection were almost gone.

Would you call this a wise kind of life? Starting in a simple profession with limited money, being driven by ambition and jealousy, racing for better and better jobs, pushing others out, getting more and more money and position, pretending to be happy with newer and newer things, but, in reality, having no simple joys like before. In this sense, wouldn't you consider money evil? Doesn't it seem foolish to want more and more things that money can buy? Discuss this with Tahir and let me know what you feel in your next letter.

Keep well and look after mother and Usha.

With much love. Papa.

It would be interesting to know your own views on money, the need for more and more, and whether you can observe in people around you and in yourself this desire for more and more things. How happy are you when you get something new. How did you feel when you lose a thing?

Think upon these things.

18. Excitement with the New

Bachhu lived in the hills of the north where delicious apples, apricots, plums, pears and other fruits grew. His father worked in an orchard; his mother did the household work, gathered firewood herself and prepared the meals, while he and his two sisters went to school. His younger brother was two years old and did not attend school. Bachhu's grandparents lived with them. There was also a young aunt, Munni, who had lost her husband in the war. They had little money but they were happy. There was electricity in their hut, newly installed, and a small transistor. Bachhu's father had got it as a present from a Bombay merchant for whom he had once done a lot of work. A young student from the college in the city nearby had taught them how to use it. Even the baby would open his eyes and ears in wonder when the radio emitted strange sounds.

Bachhu had just returned home after spending two months at his father's brother's house in the big city, some forty kilometres away and he was bursting with news of the many things he had learnt about the world outside his home. Mother had a problem quietening him down at times. It was as if he had visited a totally different world. His uncle was a Captain in the army and had a large house. Whatever Bachhu could not explain in words he would illustrate through pictures. One such was that of a refrigerator, and the family that had never moved beyond the hills, was quite excited that in their uncle's house there should be an electric box to keep things cold! It seemed so absurd to them. Then he described the large radio, the record player and the electric heater that kept the room warm instead of the *angeeih* of the hills, the television, where you saw pictures of things happening at that moment in far-away places, the telephone through which you could speak even to a person in London, New York, or Tokyo. He had also seen aeroplanes take off and was shown pictures of jets, submarines, and countless other war weapons. He was so excited. **He** said he was going to learn a lot of science and invent new things and become a famous man.

Seated on the veranda, *hookah* in his mouth was grandfather, listening to Bachhu. He smiled occasionally partaking of the fun, but at times he had a far-away look at the end of a long and excited description. He said to Bachhu, 'It is true that scientists have discovered some wonderful things and those who can afford them, must be very comfortable, but tell me, are aunt and uncle and their children really happy? Do they get together in the evenings to sing songs or tell stories? Do they have good friends? What is their life like?'

Bachhu thought for a while and then said they ought to be happy because they had so many new things in their home, but they had one sorrow — Cousin Mintoo who had joined the air force had been killed in the recent war and aunt was inconsolable. This set the tone for a different line of thought.

Grandfather asked if Bachhu noticed something: Men have used their knowledge of science both to discover extraordinary things to provide entertainment and luxury, but they had also developed instruments and weapons that could destroy life. "How many innocent people die in an air-battle nowadays!" he exclaimed. "Is it right that man should kill man and find ways and means for doing this? The world has become a frightening place," he mumbled and looked very sad.

Everybody was quiet for a while. The voice, speaking with deep feeling had its impact. Bachhu also heard his grandfather politely; the words registered but his mind was still excited with the many wonders he had come upon in his uncle's house. He could not,

at that moment, see the harsh side of the wonders of science and the inventions of technology, or how frightening the prospect of war and destruction could also be. But the seed had been sown and Bachhu questioned his grandfather later on. Grandfather had met old acquaintances who had served at the war front. He told Bachhu precious lives were lost, whole cities destroyed, thousands rendered homeless. Bachhu listened with rapt attention. Indeed, Bachhu's grandfather was right.

Have you read of the effects of the atom-bombs which were dropped by the Americans on the two cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, during World War II? The two cities were destroyed completely in a few seconds and thousands of innocent people died or were wounded, blinded or maimed for the rest of their lives.

Now we have a far more destructive weapon in the nuclear bomb. If a nuclear bomb were to be dropped anywhere in the world it would endanger life on earth, because apart from human lives it would destroy plants, animals, birds, and insects and large areas of the earth would become barren and lifeless. Isn't it sad that man should utilise scientific knowledge for destruction?

Yet, there is also the bright side. It is equally true that welcome discoveries of science and technology are marvels that have to be seen to be believed. Can you make a list of the wonders that science has achieved in the fields of communication, engineering, agriculture, medicine, etc? It is true man has suffered, but man has also benefited greatly by the work of devoted scientists. Read about their lives, their hard work, dedication, diligence and perseverance. The study of science can be an extraordinary experience, opening the doors to new worlds for you as well.

19. Parents' Anxieties

Have you ever given thought to the anxieties and worries parents go through for your sake? Here are some examples:

Faisel's mother was worried about his health. His school timings were baffling — 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. The boy had to leave home by 6.30 a.m. to catch the school bus. With a great deal of coaxing he would gulp down a glass of milk on some days, and run off to school without anything on other days. To get children to drink milk is most difficult and yet that is the most complete food available. Faisel's mother would get up early, by 5 a.m., to prepare some *parathas* or sandwiches for the boy, and she lovingly packed this into his tiffin box. She would tuck in a bit of fruit when possible. However, on most days she was never sure that he had his tiffin during the recess. It was sometimes the crow that had picked it up, for there were a lot of crows that congregated at the school during recess time when a hundred boys or more were opening their tiffin boxes; sometimes, some other boys dipped into the box and returned it empty just to tease him, for these are the ways of boys at school. All this meant, that the boy had nothing to eat till about 2 p.m. when he came home ravenously hungry. Faisel's mother knew this was not good for his health. Young boys and girls need to have a wholesome, nutritious diet at regular hours. The body, when growing, requires a lot of protein and calcium and vitamins. She also worried that he did not get enough exercise, for the school had no playground. It was in a crowded part of the city. Right food, right exercise, right sleep — these seemed to be so

important for growing children. His mother helplessly worried about his health, and she could not do anything about school timings, for schools have their own problems.

Jaspal and Yashpal were brothers. Jaspal was the more serious of the two and was interested in his studies. Yashpal was ten years of age and in the sixth class where many new subjects are introduced, but he was still very playful. The teachers often wrote in his diary that he had not completed his homework for the day. Mother would persuade him at times, scold him at other times; father would enter into the debates. Sometimes, and with great difficulty, he would be made to sit at his desk. Mother worried as to why some children are naturally too playful for too long and whether this boy would ever make good. She avoided comparisons with Jaspal who was all she could wish for, but the younger one was an enigma to her.

Deepu was now in the ninth class and although she was not a timid child, her mother worried about many little things. The bus did not come near their house, so Deepu and her friend, Maria, went by rickshaw. Although the rickshaw man was reliable and the school was only a half-an-hour's distance away, her mother worried about accidents and any other untoward happenings, for she was of a worrying nature. She would stand by the gate for nearly an hour before the expected time so that she could see the rickshaw at a distance, returning home. Times being what they are it was becoming increasingly unsafe for girls to move about freely in that town. There were many unpleasant characters loitering here and there and so her worry was natural.

Vikram's father was determined that his boy should become an electrical engineer like him. He wanted him to enter the Indian Institute of Technology after his twelfth standard, which meant that he had to score very high marks. The boy was bright and was getting seventy percent marks now but "that will not do" said his father. Unless he secured ninety percent marks he would not mind a chance in the entrance tests, for the competition to the I.I.T's and other engineering colleges was stiff and as his father worried and goaded him day in and day out. It was as if he was reliving his younger days in his son, so much was the pressure. Sometimes for the best of reasons, fathers are so ambitious that their expectations from their sons and daughters are very high. This brings about a great deal of tension in the house. If you are in such a situation how would you face it? Think about it.

Arjun's mother was at a loss about her son and spent sleepless nights over the reports from school about the boy's behaviour. They found him aggressive and violent. He used foul language, they said, and the poor lady wondered where he was picking this up from, for there was nobody in the house who used such language. His father had died and she brought him up alone and did her very best for him with her meagre means. Yet, he had become restless and disobedient and he was not yet in the seventh class. She would appeal to him with all her heart and sometimes he responded, for there was a nice side to him, especially where his mother was concerned, but the reports continued to be the same — fighting, bullying, teasing, not doing any serious study, and so on. Her anxiety was painful to watch.

Manju's parents were very poor. They had three children and all of them went to school. Although the school did not charge tuition fees, the costs of textbooks and notebooks and stationery were rising year by year and so too the cost of uniforms, and every June the parents spent sleepless nights wondering how they would meet these

mounting costs. They did not want the children to sense this and so they kept it all a secret, bearing the burden themselves and putting on a brave smile in front of the children. As prices rise day by day many parents suffer a lot to educate their children.

Sanjay's mother was disillusioned. The boy had shown so much promise when young, but now that he had come to the ninth class he felt he had grown big and should be treated as an adult. He was no longer willing to listen to his mother or father. His friends were supreme. There was even a complaint that he had missed school one afternoon to see a movie. Sanjay's mother didn't like the look of his friends. They were all at that awkward age when legs grow long and beards appear on the face and boys don't know quite how to meet these physical changes. That is when they imagine they are quite capable of managing themselves and resent adult interference. Sanjay's mother prayed and hoped this was a passing phase and it would all be over soon.

Take the case of Supriya who was also in the ninth class in another school and her group of friends: Mumtaz, Sheila, Aparna, Rita and so on. Their mothers tried to understand the ways of modern girls but were sometimes at a loss. They wondered when these girls ever studied as they were so restless. So much of their time outside school was spent on listening to film music over the radio or in idle chatter. They considered study a necessary evil. Their mothers recalled their own school days when they held their teachers in awe and showed a lot of respect for school rules and did everything on time. "What has happened to the world?" they worried. They did not seem to know how to influence their own daughters.

Parents' worries are varied and many. They cover a wide range of human life — physical, emotional, intellectual, social and so on. They worry about the lack of outward manners. They worry about the inward state of mind and heart. They worry about their young for many, many reasons. Perhaps children are not aware that though they love their parents, they cause them great anxiety without meaning to do so.

Where do you stand? Find out for yourself if you have given any cause for worry to your parents. Talk it over with them and you may find them very understanding and helpful. Often it is because you avoid talking things over as they occur, that these anxieties accumulate. Parents are your best friends in the world and there is much that you can do to relieve their worries.

20. On Beauty

Amol and Amita were good friends. They shared many things together, particularly their love of beautiful things. Amol had an eye for line, form and proportion. Amita loved colour. While Amol communicated his thoughts and feelings, his awareness of beauty in terms of sculpture, Amita communicated through shades of colour. The boy had a feel in his bones, as it were, for three dimensional structures such as buildings and statues. The girl lost herself in landscape painting.

The Tai Mahal with its exquisite domes and columns evoked in Amol an unforgettable response. He spent hours studying the grandeur of the Red Fort, the extraordinary proportion of a mosque or a cathedral. When travelling in the south he marvelled at the exquisite *gopurams* of the temples at Madurai, Rameswaram and Kancheepuram. In his spare time, he would sketch what he saw and show it to Amita. He loved thumbing

through design books and his eyes noticed many fine points about architecture. He was about fifteen at the time, but this had been his passion from childhood. He knew he would become an architect one day.

Amita, his cousin, had been his best friend all along. They were of the same age and shared this love for beautiful things. Her interest was in painting, and starting with pencil and crayon as a child, she had shown great talent in the use of other media such as water colour and oil. Her landscapes were admired by all, for the shades of colours she used. Rembrandt was her favourite in choice of light and shade. She too was conversant with the works of the master painters of the world and could distinguish between a Van Gogh, a Hebbal and a Hussain, a Gulam Sheikh and Swaminathan. She thought Picasso was a great artist. All this was possible because much of her spare time was devoted to the reference of art books.

Amol's father was an art historian, a professor who had made a deep study of the history of world art. He taught in the University and was regarded as a great scholar. He had an enormous library at home, of books on art, design, architecture, music, world civilization and such like. It was here that Amol and Amita learnt to love books and they were different from many of their schoolmates who did not read serious books. They too enjoyed light reading but were on the whole attracted by things of beauty. Their parents took them along when they travelled through different parts of India and this led them on to discover that our craftsmen in India produced exquisite things like the dexterously woven baskets of Assam, the minutely embroidered shawls of Kashmir, the delicate brassware of Jaipur, the beautifully shaped miniature sculptures of the south, the wall paintings once exclusively done by the women of Mithila in Bihar, the mica work of Hyderabad and the handloom designs all over the country. It was as if their eyes were drinking of beauty all the time.

Amol's mother was from Tamil Nadu and his father was from Uttar Pradesh. She was a great lover of Hindustani music and this had brought them together. She also played the *Veena* and was conversant with Carnatic music forms. Her favourites, however, were Pandit Jasraj's vocal music and Amjad Ali Khan's *sarod*. Neither of them could understand why there was supposed to be an estrangement between the north and the south in our country. She spoke fluent Hindi and he had learnt good Tamil. They saw great beauty in each other's distinctive ways of life. They wanted their children to grow up to be good Indians respecting the cultures and tradition-, of all parts of the country. They were very sorry whenever they found like minded people who identified themselves only with their particular state Carnatic music and art that rightly belonged to everyone.

On one occasion something happened to them which opened their eyes in another kind of wonder. They were travelling up in the north. During a boat ride on the Ganges they saw one morning the most exquisite sunrise. It was as if a ball of many splendid colours was coming slowly out of the waters — pink, amber, gold, and red. All four of them were breathless with joy.

Travelling further they were in the midst of the Kumaon hills and early one morning they caught a view of the snows on the great mountain peaks of Trishul, Nanda Devi and Annapurna. It was so magnificent that they were silent for a long while. The mind was very quiet.

"Beauty is the fullness of heart," she said.

“Rather, Beauty is the emptying of the mind,” he said, “for at such moments you have no thoughts in the mind at all.”

Amol and Amita were silent for a long time.

After that experience they were very humble, and less sure of their own opinions on painting or architecture or music. They had seen the glory of God. Man’s experience on canvas or stone seemed limited in comparison.

Have you enjoyed seeing beautiful things? What are your favourites? Have you ever watched a sunrise or a sunset? Do it sometime. What is good taste? Discuss it in class.

21. When Trees Hold a Conference What Do They Talk About?

About the cruelty of man, of course. And this is how it happened:

Sudha loved the old house in which they were living. It belonged to her grandfather. It was a ramshackle place and was coming to pieces but it had those high ceilings of yester years, beautiful arches at the entrance and Sudha felt it had character, the sort that goes with houses of an earlier century. She loved moving in and out of it and most of all she loved the mango tree in the compound. Often she would sit under it and admire its branches, the way they were formed, its leaves and their personality, their shades of colour and so on. The only child in the family, she had grown to be very reserved. Her only friends were trees, and of all, this particular mango tree, with which she would converse for long hours after school.

That day she was miserable as she sat under the tree, choking with tears, for a decision had been taken by her parents that they would move to a modern flat in another part of the city. They were selling this house to some contractor and Sudha chanced to see him that morning. He looked so harsh with a frown and a bristling moustache that she was afraid he would demolish everything she loved — that door with a beautiful carving that led to her father’s study, the arched verandah at the back, the dome-shaped windows, and so on. She worried particularly about the mango tree. Would this cruel man cut it down? There was so much said these days about the ruthless cutting down of forests and trees. Would she lose her friend? Earlier, she had asked her father why on earth they should move when they had such a nice house, but father had said it was old and did not have modern amenities. The toilets were old-fashioned and far away from the bedrooms; there was no wash basin; no proper kitchen or store, not even ventilation. Above all, the new house was in a good locality where she would have friends and she could even cycle down to school. It was an apartment, part of a set of multi-storeyed flats. They were on the fourth floor and there were eight floors. Sudha hated the whole scheme but she couldn’t argue with her parents, because after all, you can only point out something to your parents if you feel strongly about it. You can’t argue with them. Apparently they know better because they are older and wiser. So she kept her sorrow to herself and now under her mango tree she wept quietly and she dozed off. That is when she dreamt this dream:

Her own special mango tree had called a Conference of Trees in the Himalayas, or so it appeared. There were so many trees: banyan, peepal, ashoka, palm, pine, doedar, neem, fig, rubber, jackfruit, mulberry, jamun, teak, sal, parijata, sandalwood, rudraksh,

tamarind, cotton, kadam, cinnamon, rain, walnut and eucalyptus, as also gulmohar, jacaranda, amaltash, etc.

Her own mango tree was the first to speak up. She proposed that banyan should chair the Conference and all the trees swayed in approval. So banyan was the chairman. He then asked Sudha's mango to explain why she had summoned this meeting and mango gave a short speech on how their lives were threatened in these heartless days by the cruelty of man. She reported the various cuttings she had witnessed near her place of stay: how cruel men in dark robes axed ten trees in front of Sudha's house because a factory was to be put up and how she feared for her life because her dear friend Sudha was going away. She wanted firm action. Then every tree spoke up and it was practically the same story, of how trees were being cut mercilessly in forests and plains, how they saw their friends and brothers who were swaying happily a minute ago, felled by some cruel stroke, how it didn't make sense, for trees were meant to serve man in a hundred ways and how in the olden days they were even worshipped. The teak made the most powerful speech of all and gave gruesome details of how the slopes of all hills and mountains were getting eroded. He described how some strange men came secretly in huge lorries by night, how they camped there for a day, looking around and marking the areas and how cruelly they axed his brothers. It was all accomplished quickly, heartlessly and then the trunk of the trees were cut into logs and placed in piles on the lorries and taken away, "God knows where!" he said. And he cried that if he was alive today it was only because there was no space in the lorry! He was sure they would come back one day. As he cried, the others also cried and it all became very emotional. So banyan called them to order and suggested that they should go about the business in a cool and rational manner. He wanted bare facts to be narrated as to what men did with the trees and why they were cutting them.

The facts that emerged were: i) that suddenly there was a boom in population and this resulted in the need for space for more houses and cultivated land, ii) that the wood which was used earlier mainly for fuel and as timber for houses and furniture was now in greater demand for various other purposes. Wood products had become very popular. From wood was made paper, rayon, cellophane, photographic films, plastic and synthetic lacquers. That is the reason they explained the landscape was becoming so bare. The green earth was no longer green. People did not realise that this ruthless cutting of trees was also responsible for changes in the climate. Places were getting hotter or colder. The seasons were no longer moving in the same cycle. It was hot when you expected it to be cold and vice versa. Rainfall was also affected. People had to understand that trees were their brothers and were here to protect the earth and their life on earth.

Considering all this their Chairman asked if there was some hope for the earth and the tree families and slowly some of them spoke up: "Yes," said the gulmohar and spoke of her friend Mintoo who cared for her. Mintoo was a little girl of nine.

"Yes," said the jamun and spoke of the kindness of his friends Ahmad and Akhtar and how they cared for him.

"Yes, indeed," many of the flowering trees spoke of how the children in the primary classes in the mission school had looked after them.

"Yes, of course," said the mango and spoke of Sudha's friendship.

“So children are our hope”, remarked peepul.

Then neem, ashok, teak, deodar, rubber, cotton all spoke up about an extraordinary thing that happened to them. Just when they were fearing their end, groups of bright, kind looking men and women came and clung to them, one at each tree, and when the axe-men came they could not axe them without killing the men and so the trees were saved! They heard the people say that this was called the ‘Chipko Movement’ and people who cared for trees had prevented the clearing of forests and the cutting down of wooded areas in many places by this act of kindness and bravery. Growing from this there were new societies being formed by intelligent, sensitive people and were called: the Friends of the Trees, the Million Trees Club, and so on.

After hearing all this banyan got a resolution passed by all the trees giving their silent support to children in schools and out of schools, to young men and women of the Chipko Movement, to the various dubs and to whoever cared for the well-being of trees. They also approved heartily of the plan in some cities: ‘Each One Plant One’. They wanted their families to grow.

At this point Sudha woke up with a start. Her mango tree was still there and there was no sign of any Conference. “What a dream!” she sighed.

A week later, when with great hesitation, she revisited her old house from the new one, her heart leapt up with joy at the sight of her mango tree. The contractor had not cut it- Even though he looked fierce he was a kind man and didn’t cut trees unnecessarily. He invited her to the house and noticing her fondness for the mango tree he told her that she could visit the house anytime and be with the tree.

Will you take care of trees?

Will you plant a new tree wherever you are, even as you grow up, and look after it?

Have any trees been cut in your neighbourhood? When were they cut, by whom, and why?

Are there any groups of people where you live who have formed clubs for the protection of trees? What is the work they do?

22. Who Cares for Public Property?

Mr. Prasad was a dedicated teacher. He had taken to teaching as a vocation soon after he had completed his M.A. degree in history with a first class, because he felt education was the highest profession man could aspire to. Although he had other more lucrative offers of jobs in tourism, business and so on, he decided to teach and that at a school in preference to a University. He was clear in his mind that he wanted to meet the minds of the young and help them to learn and learn from them himself. He believed that teachers must keep learning all their lives and a teacher’s true education comes from children. To him, right education was not merely acquiring information from books and passing exams. Right education meant learning to observe life around, learning to use your eyes and ears. It meant learning to listen to all the sounds around you and being attentive. It meant relating to people in the family, at school, in society and being considerate to them. It meant being concerned about the earth we live in and being related to nature, to trees and flowers, birds and animals, the skies and the stars and so on. He had a very wide

vision of education. Children loved him because he was so human and understanding and also because he was very intelligent and had a first-rate mind.

During the last one week, so many things were happening in the city where he lived that he was full of anguish and even anger. There was a report that a group of students from the local college had burnt a bus in which they were travelling because of a quarrel with the bus conductor which led to blows and finally to the destruction of the bus itself. It was a government bus and this meant it was the property of the public. He thought of the state of public property elsewhere and realised that while people cared a great deal for the things that belonged to themselves or their families they treated common property like trams, post offices, banks, railway stations, pavements, roads, offices, guest houses, parks and gardens with no respect. He wanted his children of the ninth class to observe all this and learn how to respond to such situations before they left school. So he talked to them, pointing out what was happening and encouraged them to make a thorough study of their own *mohalla*, their own locality.

They set out in groups with notebook and pen and visited public places around their locality and noted down whether public property had been damaged or was intact and, if damaged, the nature and extent of such damage. This was a fact-finding study and included visits to the local hospital, the railway station which was quite near by, and some government offices, apart from the pavements and a children's park, (that was what it was supposed to be, but in reality was full of rubbish and the bars and the swings were rusty and broken and no child ever came there). They noted down all the defects and came back to class.

A discussion followed on what action should be taken. Some pupils advocated collecting money and repairing them themselves. But then they realised this course of action was of limited value because people would continue to destroy these things all the same. Another suggestion was that they should meet the officials at their offices and talk to the managers, directors, etc. to ensure that their offices and property were taken care of and were not meant to be used without care. Then they realised that the managers may not take school students seriously. They may be nice to them but explain that they were helpless. The public had to cooperate and this was difficult. So they gave up that line of action. One student suggested that they write in 'Letters to the Editor' in daily newspapers and bring to the attention of several readers that such violence and destruction ruined our own *mohalla*, that public property belonged to each one of us and each one of us must take care of it. They approved of the idea and a group started working on several drafts of such letters.

This led to a discussion on whether it was possible to really change the beliefs and ideas of other people and how to create public awareness and a sense of civic responsibility. Although many suggestions were put forward the general feeling of the class was that since society is made up of individuals, each person must feel the responsibility and act in a way showing utmost care and respect for public property and public places and only then would their *mohalla* change. So strongly did they feel this, under the inspiration of their teacher, that each of them in the ninth class decided to do themselves first what they expected others to do. As the old saying goes: 'Charity begins at home'; so they started picking up pieces of paper in the quadrangle of the school and throwing them into dust-bins. They attended to leakage of taps to avoid wastage of water.

They switched off ceiling fans when they left a room, to prevent wastage of electricity. They talked to little children who sometimes, out of fun, scraped desks and chairs with blades or pen-knives. They repaired torn notice-boards. They organised the proper collection of garbage outside the school gate by helping the municipal man whenever he came. Then they went to every house in the locality near the school and handed out leaflets they had prepared, urging people to care for public property, to keep roads clean, to care for trees and not cut them down, and so on. In some houses they were received well and the people praised them for their work. In other houses the people were quite cold and closed their doors. They learnt to take both praise and blame without any fuss. And as they did their best they learnt one great secret — you have to respect property yourself if you want others to do so.

Do you think this is also part of education or would you consider it a waste of time? Discuss the whole question in class. If you think this is important will you start observing what is happening around you, in your-school, at home and in your locality? Will you help your younger brother or sister do likewise?

23. Caring for the Environment

Their headmaster was young and energetic and had what one would call “a modern mind”. He was very contemporary and was actively aware of new discoveries and trends in the various fields of scientific enquiry. He was a passionate environmentalist and his pupils were a lively, vivacious group. The headmaster believed that his pupils should be exposed to good minds and often invited specialists to talk to the senior classes. The school had recently become a member of the newly formed Environmental Society in the city. They had also completed a project on ecology and on that day, a talk was scheduled on ‘Caring for the Environment’ by a well known scholar.

It so happened that it was the second day of the Third Test Match between India and England. Kapildev was leading the team and the match was being played at Calcutta. The boys had their ears glued to a transistor that one of them had brought to the school and the expression on their faces, expressed their excitement and interest. Amarnath was out, Ravi Shastri was batting at forty-eight and Gavaskar was not out at eighty-six. They were anticipating the thrill of Gavaskar’s century. It was at this point, their own school hero, cricket captain Raghu rounded them all up. Reluctantly they trooped in, one or two of them openly muttering, a few others kicking at pebbles on the path, to work out their annoyance. A few listened to Raghu who explained: “We have a guest speaker. We have to show him respect after all. He has come all the way to speak to us”.

The lecturer was a young man with a very pleasant face and keen eyes. He commenced, by apologising profusely that he had agreed to speak on a day when they ought to be listening to the cricket commentary! He confessed that he was also interested in Sunil Gavaskar’s century. So disarming was he, that all their resistance was broken at once.

He made the lecture so interesting that soon, the entire lot of students were moving with him, following his explanation, deeply absorbed. His theme was ‘Environmental Hazards’. He spoke of how man was deeply related to the earth and to his environment. Man is not an isolated being. He has need for air, water and earth. They are the resources

from which he draws his energy. In days gone by, man had a harmonious relation with nature and took from her lap the very minimum needed for his survival but as so called civilisation advanced, he began to destroy nature ruthlessly for his own comforts and luxury. He is now becoming totally insensitive to the sounds and silences of nature.

He showed slides to illustrate his talk on how man was destroying the environment, how environmental pollution had become a crucial problem. "You can observe three kinds of pollution", he said, "air, water, and noise." How was air polluted? It was by the fumes of buses, trucks, cars, aeroplanes, which made the atmosphere unhealthy to breathe and live in. The location of industries and factories close to living quarters contaminated the atmosphere by their fumes, chemical and other wastes. Man uses chemicals for industry and creates in the process, vast amounts of chemical wastes. If these cannot be recycled they remain pollutants and harm the earth and the atmosphere. They are dangerous to birds, animals, plants and man. Besides, the carbon monoxide emitted by factories destroys the purity of the air and people are denied a breath of fresh air in industrial areas. He showed several examples of atmospheric pollution from all over the world. The children were aghast.

Then he dealt with water pollution. Look at the state of the sewers in a city. Notice how all the wastes from the homes and the city itself go into the river and from there on to the sea. Similarly, all industrial wastes are emptied into the river.

In many places the river is man's life, being the best source of water, but the callous way in which we throw all waste materials, like kitchen garbage, as also human waste, soils the river irreparably. You see, right down, the sea bed is the origin of life with the growth of very small creatures, but they need a fresh and clean underwater environment to grow in. Unfortunately they are all killed because the sea is polluted. At the surface level also down to 10 to 20 feet there is waste material accumulating. The waters of the earth will cease to be our treasure if we continue in this manner. Many scientists and others are worried about the destruction of man's water resources. He illustrated this as well and further pointed out how men were killing rare species of whales and seals for their own food and how even dolphins were becoming rare.

The next problem he touched on, was that of meeting the noise pollution in the city. Significantly, at that moment, a microphone in the locality blared the latest film song disturbing the peace of the school and the children laughed spontaneously. They were very familiar with this type of pollution, for it was impossible to escape noticing that restaurants and meeting places, temples and sacred places were all using loud speakers either to draw attention or entertain. "Don't you think drawing attention in this manner is a deplorable thing to do?" he asked. "Little do people realise that music, loud and exciting, when played through gramophones with amplifiers at street corners, left their mark on the atmosphere."

Another source of noise pollution was, of course, the car and truck horns that blared through the city roads. Traffic was becoming uncontrollable due to the rise in population and most city streets were crowded with huge trucks and lorries. No one cared about diverting them or regulating them. These are some of the hazards of industrialisation, he said, whatever may be the benefits.

The children were full of comments and questions. They pointed out how near their own homes and even in front of the school there were mounds of garbage that the

Municipality did not clear regularly, which in turn made living intolerable. "Something must be done," they said. The lecturer agreed most appreciatively and remarked that a beginning could be made by distinguishing between three types of garbage: the kitchen garbage that is the real waste, then items such as leaf, fruit skins and flower, and dry waste, like paper, bottles, plastic, etc. If these could be placed in each home in three separate bins, then the kitchen waste could be thrown into the Municipal Containers for disposal; the leaf, fruit, etc. could be recycled and used as organic manure and the paper and bottles could be disposed of separately for reuse. This would minimise the problem of waste. The children had learnt something new which they talked over with their mothers later.

The children next questioned the speaker about the problems arising from the ruthless cutting of trees and forests. The speaker pointed out how deforestation affects the biosphere, the ecology of the earth. When trees are cut, the water-cycle of that area is affected and there will always be less rain. "Do you notice how our climate is changing?" he asked. Most cities are becoming warmer with a steep rise in temperature. There are droughts and periods of very little rainfall because the whole process of evaporation and condensation, which you must have read about, is endangered. Besides, there is abundant soil erosion causing damage to the land. Trees are meant to be protected over thousands of years and the earth kept green and beautiful. That is why it is so important for children to learn to plant at least one tree and take care of it. Gradually, as you grow older, you will be more careful about caring for the environment, about looking after the earth, he said. And at this point he showed the most extraordinary pictures of the earth taken by some cosmonauts from space. He appealed to them to look after this beautiful earth of ours.

The children were moved and so too were the teachers. They had become so absorbed in the lecture that the earlier excitement over the cricket score receded into the background. And so as the lecturer went out of the hall he was surrounded by an eager group of pupils, some of them wanting to have a second look at the slides.

Apart from this, from then on, the school's participation was more active and spontaneous in the programmes of the city's Environmental Society. Each class undertook a project for the local Citizens' Committee.

24. On Being Afraid

They were all residing in a girls' hostel and had gathered together by the river that morning.

"Did you hear that loud bang last night after we put off the lights?" asked the girl in the red sweater. "I was so scared. What was it?"

"I don't know," said Sheila. "But I was scared, too. It was so dark outside, I was afraid to go out".

"I hate to go out in the dark. I feel as if something dreadful could happen," said Anita.

"What are you afraid of?" they asked the new girl.

"Of snakes," she said and they smiled.

“What about you, Lalitha? Aren’t you afraid of anything?”

Lalitha was not taking part in the conversation. She was sitting by the river looking rather pensive. But at the mention of her name she pricked up her ears. “Oh, of ghosts,” she said making it up on the spot for she had not thought about it before. Strange, isn’t it, the way we make up things all the time?

“Mr. Anand read us some ghost stories in class today,” added Vanita, “and it made my blood curdle”.

“I am not afraid of anything,” boasted Sujata who had travelled with her parents to America and had seen something of the other parts of the world.

“What about the Maths test tomorrow?” interposed the girl in the red sweater. “Aren’t you afraid of that?”

“My God! I quite forgot about it,” said Sujata and her eyes showed that she was mortally afraid of the test in question.

Lalitha, the pensive one, intervened this time rather quietly. “You know I was thinking of my mother. She is terribly afraid of my father. He drinks, you know, and we are all scared when he returns home at night.”

“It is exactly the opposite in my house,” said Sheila. “Father is scared of my mother. She **is** the one who is very strict.” They chatted animatedly that morning about their fears. They were always, afraid that some teacher or the other might scold them for doing or not doing. Sometimes they said they imagined that their own classmates may laugh at them for giving a foolish answer which could make them feel very ill at weak and so they were afraid to participate in class; at other times they were afraid they may be late for P.T. or games or dance. And, of course, there is always the dread of doing poorly in the examinations, of failing in this subject or that or of what their parents would say about their progress reports. This was common to all and some mentioned that they disliked being compared with their brothers or sisters or anyone else in class and were afraid their parents were bound to do so. Then again there was also the fear of boys, that they may lease them, may pass comments, may not speak politely or behave in a less gentlemanly fashion. These girls seemed to be consumed by so many little fears.

But did you notice that all these fears were of something *may* happen in *the future* and seemed to arise in their own minds. First, the thought that something may happen arises in the mind and immediately it evokes a feeling of fear. Do you notice fear is nothing but a thought of something that may happen in the future, or a remembrance of something that happened in the past and is to be avoided ?

And also consider what happens to you when you are full of fear? Suppose you are afraid of not being popular among your classmates, or of” what they may think of you. or of their not accepting you as pan of the group fully, then what happens to you? You begin to imitate them in everything they do don’t you? You follow the way they dress, the way they talk, the language they use the jokes they crack, the way they walk or do things and so on. Even if you feel like dressing differently or doing something differently, you suppress that feeling and decide to do what the others do and avoid conflict. Gradually, starting from these small things it is likely that your thinking also is shaped by the group for you may be afraid to be original, to have different views on anything. So you cease to be creative if you are afraid. You will never know what it is to be free if you are all the

time trapped as in a cage by the fear of others. And, mind you, this is equally true of adults. Many grown up men and women are mortally afraid of the opinion of society, of what others will say about them. In this respect they are like children. They too are not free and happy or original and creative.

Then consider how one should deal with this thing called *fear*. Is it good to ignore it and let little fears accumulate throughout school life in the hope that one day you will be unafraid? Can that happen if you don't learn to meet the little fears of daily life here and now?

Would it be all right to run away from it and play games or see a funny cinema and hope that escaping from it will help you get rid of fear? Should you suppress it and tell yourself everyday, "I am brave", "I am not afraid", when actually you are afraid?

Or would it be more intelligent to see that little fears do not accumulate and become a big thing inside you by understanding each incident, as it happens, and by not letting fear take root in the mind at all? Try it sometime and see what happens.

Also discuss these things openly at home and at school. It may be fun to share your fears with others.

25. Feelings

What are feelings? How do they arise? Have you ever been aware of a strong emotion arising in you?

For example, have you been out on a terrace or a verandah and suddenly become aware of the full moon? How did you feel at that moment? Did you not feel it was an extraordinary sight to see the whole sky aglow? Did you feel your heart throb and a great sensation fill your entire being? Did this ever happen to you? Or, has the sight of the new moon, just a thin arc with a lone star nearby thrilled you?

Have you *ever felt* the majesty of the mountain not just from a picture-book but by being in real contact with it as you stared at its snow-capped peaks? Have you ever *felt* a mountain?

What about the ocean with its vast expanse of water? How does it feel to stand on the sands and look beyond the horizon, listening to the swinging, dancing waves, sometimes calm, sometimes frolicking, sometimes angry? Have you ever taken the whole scene in, with your eyes and ears? If not, do so next time and see what kind of feelings arise in you.

Nature is generous and has much to offer. If your heart is open you will listen to and notice the sounds of nature and respond to the wind whistling through the leaves, the warbling notes of a bird, the murmur of a brook, you will watch the dewdrop on a flower, the outline of a tree against the sky, the glow of sunset on the sea. All this beauty of sight and sound evoke feelings of wonder and great well-being.

There are other times when your feelings are different. Perhaps you have turned your face away at the sight of a beggar, for you cannot bear the twinge of pain it brings. Or it may be a feeling of tenderness or sympathy for a disabled person to whom you want to reach out. It may be concern for the woman carrying a child in her arms while balancing a large basket on her head running across the road; it may be a touch of pain felt when

you hear the whine of a dog hit by a stone- or, the sight of a horse being whipped to make it trot faster, or again, the sight of an overburdened rickshaw with the poor man struggling to cope with his burden. Then there is the feeling of silent awe that accompanies the sight of a dead body being carried on four shoulders.

Think of other situations — the sickening smell of a dirty lane, the stench of an open lavatory, the stark reality of poverty stricken people on the road, the strange sounds and curiously mixed odours at a railway station you can surely add on to the list.

We respond in different ways to different situations. It would be interesting to observe how we meet these situations and what impact they make on us. How strongly do we feel anything? Will you try watching how you respond to situations and if you are in the habit of keeping a diary, try noting down your feelings about the things you observe.

Let us now examine a common emotion, felt by young and old, teacher and student, parents and friends; the feeling of anger. Can you find out the things that make you angry?

Once a group of students like you, were asked to describe what made them most angry. Some very interesting statements made were:

When I am accused of something I have not done.

When someone has wronged my friend.

When teacher is prejudiced against me and is partial to another.

When I want something very badly and can't get it.

When mother keeps nagging me and all the time to do this or that.

Now consider the amount of chemical energy that is wasted when the body is in a state of anger. Observe how you suppress your feelings and boil inside or burst out in a rage and say all kinds of things, or how you cry in anger. Think of the amount of time it takes you to be normal again after the incident. It *is* important to understand ourselves and all the feelings that arise in *us*. Just as there are so many extraordinary things outside us, there are many strange, unexplained things inside us too, in our minds and hearts. We usually love to go out on long journeys, don't we, discovering the beauties of the countryside, the wonders of the earth and the seas and the skies. Likewise, it might be fun to go on a voyage of discovery inside us, wouldn't it — to find out all about ourselves, our thoughts, our feelings, our responses, our actions? The beauty is that for the inward journey you do not have to spend a lot of money or go away to a hill-side to meditate or do anything different. If you observe yourself, the way you walk, talk, dress, eat and relate to your friends, teachers, parents, if you learn to look at the trees and the flowers and the beauty of the earth, if you observe people and their ways, you begin to learn a lot of things about yourself and your feelings.

Think of some situations at home or at school that awakened strong feelings in you. Talk it over with your friends.

If you look around, you will find that Nature has infinite form, infinite beauty and infinite variety. Can you put down some aspects of Nature that have touched you?

26. The Art of Questioning

Let us look at a day in your life and see if there is any place in it for questions. You are young and naturally curious and your mind is possibly full of questions about life around you, about what you read in books, about what others tell you and so on. In fact, one may say, the art of learning is closely related to the art of questioning.

Notice that at school something quite different happens most of the time. It is the teacher who asks you the questions and you have to find the answers! She has taught you some physics or history, perhaps, and she questions you closely to find out if you have understood what has been explained. So, gradually, your mind becomes more full of answers to questions on various subjects rather than questions to which you want the answer. Of course, if she is an intelligent teacher she allows you to raise questions at every point and lets you discover things for yourself. In that way, she knows your mind will keep growing because there is wonder and curiosity in it.

As a matter of fact, it was the feeling of wonder that was the birth of what we call *subjects* today, or the various branches of knowledge. Discovering cave paintings, rock edicts, parchments, coins and the like, the historian asked: Who could have produced these? When did they live? What was their life like? And thus the study of the story of man began. Looking at the vagaries of climate and rainfall, of mountains and earthquakes, man discovered more about the earth by questioning, and so was born what we call geography. While history dealt with questions related to man in time, geography sought answers to questions about man on earth. Wondering about the physical laws of the universe, men asked questions about natural phenomena which have resulted in physics and chemistry. Newton's law of gravitation was the answer to his wonder: "Why does the apple fall to the ground?" The biologist asked questions about plants and animals and their behaviour. This is so with practice everything you call a *subject*. They are answers to questions. Their starting p. is wonder, leading on to curiosity and enquiry. Does language belong to group? What was its origin? Think about it.

In your daily life too, you can see it happening all the time, can't you? You spot a snake in the compound and instead of running away from it, all rush around and wish to look at it closely and you marvel at its glow skin and its graceful writhing movements. You see a car that has broken do on the road and you are full of questions about how it happened and how a driver is going to get it to move. You hear there are computers being brought to schools and you want to know more about them. Our surroundings eve questions as day moves into night and on to another day.

Likewise, feelings arouse questions. You see so many people who are pc and you notice so many who are rich and naturally you are moved to ask: " W is this so? Why must some people suffer? Why does this inequality exist: Is there no justice in the world? You listen to the story of people fighting with each other and ask, "Can't we live happily? Why do people fight?" and on. Compassion is the source of questions too.

If you learn this art of questioning and keep your minds alive you will fir that you do not accept opinions and beliefs blindly. When you read the newspaper you will not be carried away by one item of news or the other, good or bad. You will pause and question if the report could be right. Try it sometime. If someone tells you that, "If you do such and such a thing it will result in such a thing", you will examine it critically. Cultivating a mind that listens to questions and thinks over them quietly is a good thing. If your mind is

stuffed with the opinions and beliefs of others it will be like a cramped store room with no space, no windows into the world. Isn't that so?

Then do you notice that when you are far away from crowds, alone and by yourself, perhaps at night, certain very personal questions may arise within the mind?

Why did I get angry with 'X' today?

Why do I generally get angry over small things?

What are my worries? What are my fears?

Little questions, big questions. Sometimes silly questions, some very serious questions. That is the time when you can have a dialogue with yourself, with nobody to bother you with their queries. And if we learn to go on questioning ourselves about what is happening inside us, we may discover many interesting things about the world within us, just as we have so much knowledge stacked in our libraries because scientists and others questioned things relentlessly and discovered new facts and laws about the world outside us.

Here is an example of a dialogue with yourself where one question can lead to another:

Why am I so nervous today?

Is it because I am afraid of exams?

Why am I afraid when I have studied everything quite well?

Am I afraid that I may fail?

You may not fail.

Yes, of course, but I may?

Then is your fear real?

Not quite, but it is a thought that something may happen.

What is a thought?

It is something that arises in the mind.

Is it a thing?

Most probably it is, though we can't see it as we can see this chair.

Where do thoughts reside?

In the brain, perhaps.

How do they arise?

From relating to people and events outside us. For example: the thought came to me that I may fail because I was faced with an exam.

Why should one be afraid of a thought then?

Yes, of course, it is silly but it happens all the same. What is thinking?

Now continue with this line of questioning and you may come upon some very important discoveries, as important as those of Einstein's!

Learning to question things happening outside and inside us can be fun indeed.

30. Getting to Know Our Villages

This is the story of Kripal Singh and Kamaljeet Kaur who had been brought up in towns all along and were quite ignorant about conditions in the villages. This is also a story for many of our boys and girls who know so little about the real India, the India that lives in our villages.

For a long time *Chacha* Harinder Pal had been inviting the children to his home in the village, for unlike his brother Gurminder Singh who sought the comforts of town life, Harinder had settled on his farm. He occasionally visited the town to meet his brother's family and at times he let his son Devinder accompany him. Devinder was a very simple boy studying in the eighth class in a rural school, very bright and very contented. He found it a little difficult to make friends with his cousins, Kripal and Kamaljeet Kaur, because their language was different, their interests, he thought, rather strange and their manners quite funny. Devinder would tire of the town very soon and crave to get back to his village, to his friend Surinder with whom he could play *gulli-danda* or *ankh-michoni* and be perfectly happy all evening.

This time Kripal and Kamaljeet made up their minds to visit the village during one of their holidays. In fact their father insisted and they made the trip, half-excited, half-doubtful for they felt there were many more exciting things to do in their own town. Nonetheless they arrived there and the first morning they were quite disappointed although their uncle had a *pucca* house with a lovely courtyard, overlooking a sparkling stream. By evening they had such good things to eat — fresh *amrud* (guavas), *bhutta* (roasted corn) huge glasses of *lassi* (sweetened buttermilk), cream, the kind they had never had before, and later the most delicious *makki ki roti* and *sarson ka saag* (*rotis* made of maize with spinach to go with it), that by night they were won over. Young people don't nurse prejudices for long. They are willing to observe and learn and make friends. They now saw Devinder in a new light, as a fine, healthy boy and Devinder too was overjoyed that his home had something to offer his cousins. By night they were relaxed and chatted happily. Uncle promised to show them round their own farm and the village, the next morning, if they could get up early.

Kamaljeet was the first to be up by five in the morning, a time unthinkable for them in the town, and being a lover of nature she walked out into the courtyard and beyond and looked up at the vast skies which she had hardly noticed before. Her aunt was in the cowshed supervising the milking of the cow and Kamaljeet found it most exciting and novel as she watched the milking for the first time in her life. Her aunt gave her some to drink, even without boiling, and she couldn't imagine that such things were possible. Milk, to town people seems to come in bottles, never from the cow!

The boys were up by this time and the whole house was agog and soon after a snack, they were ready to move out. To their utter surprise they saw a vast expanse of wheat ready for harvest, golden wheat that spoke of prosperity and well-being. Farming, in uncle Harinder's farm and in many others' had been mechanised. No longer was the plough or the bullock to be seen in plenty. There were a few scattered here and there, but the bulk of the work was done by tractors and there were little machines of various kinds

to make the work simpler. There were tube-wells and no dearth of water. Lift-irrigation had been introduced in the village and there were canals cutting through fields. The children were totally absorbed learning all about new methods of irrigation. They had read about it in their geography books back home, but it had all been so vague and dry, just a name! Now it made sense and their cousin Devinder knew so much about it all that they were amazed. A little further on, they observed the fertilisers that were piled up for use and also the pesticides. Again these had been names that now became a reality. For the first time, they touched the earth with their hands; they dug out weeds; they played with grass; they looked at the ears of golden wheat; they actually saw other crops. They marvelled at the way mounds of wheat were stored. They loved everything they saw. They were transformed people.

On another day, they went to the village dairy, a completely mechanised unit and they saw how huge and well-fed the cattle were, how clean the sheds were and how intelligently planned. They saw the fodder and the food the cattle were given. They played with the cows and the buffaloes till they were gently kicked occasionally and they would laughingly bounce like footballs in the town! They had heard the phrases 'the green revolution' and 'the white revolution' and their own teacher had tried hard to make them comprehend, but, perhaps, she too had never been to a village, for otherwise, she would have made it more vivid and much simpler. Kripal thought a visit to the village must be made compulsory for all teachers!

The rest of the days went by amidst great rejoicing and wonderful discoveries about a 'modern' village such as this. They saw the village hospital with several amenities, the primary health centre which cared for the sick. They visited Devinder's school which was a small building, but well maintained with lots of children and it seemed a happy place. When the bell rang, the children themselves carried their mats out to the open spaces and they sang songs at the assembly. One little boy read out the news. They were quite well informed about happenings in the other parts of the country. In the classrooms they sat on mats and had little *chowkis* in front of them. There were not enough black boards or maps, etc, but Kamaljeet noticed that the handwriting of these children was much nicer than hers' or her friends'! They first wrote on slates, then with reed pens and ink. Every page was beautiful. In this school there was even an improvised laboratory of tins and cans, and pulleys and bottles for them to learn science. Their teacher had gone to the town for a Seminar where he learnt all this. Devinder was, of course, the bright boy in the school.

During their walks, they noticed that the people in this village were sturdy and well-built. They were hardworking and full of new ideas. They saw a repair shop where a young man repaired cycles, pump sets, hand tools and many other household things besides. There was a village carpenter who made cots and tables and shelves. The village masons were all well-clad and hard at work from morning till evening. The farm women sang as they worked and talked quite loudly. They even had their fights. This place was full of life, for the people seemed to love a good life.

One evening they met the headman of the village panchayat, an elderly gentleman with a long, glowing grey beard and a golden coloured turban that glittered. Kripal and Kamaljeet were a little shy and wondered what they would talk to him about but soon the man put them completely at ease telling them all kinds of jokes and sharing big tumblers

of sugarcane juice with them. The tumblers in this village, they noticed, were far larger in size than any they had ever seen at home. He told them stories of the village and interspersed them with sayings from the *Granth Sahib* and tales of the Gurus. The children were very impressed and very happy. Another evening they attended a village wedding with their aunt and enjoyed themselves thoroughly. The people were so hospitable, so warm, so kind.

Their uncle then took them to see a Bhangra dance in the village and they were delighted. People of all faiths danced together — Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. Spying two little new-comers one of the men drew the children into their circle and they danced with the rest. It was all so different from the Bhangra they had done on the stage at school — so much more fun and joy and no nervousness about the audience!

“Was there no poverty in the villages?” Kripal asked. “And are all villages like this?” His uncle explained that about twenty years ago this village too was not producing as much wheat or corn as now and even now there were people who had less land of their own; there were also people who did not own any land at all and they were comparatively poor. But what had happened was that with the coming of the radio and some agricultural officers who gave lessons on improved farming, the farmers of this village were willing to change their old habits and learn modern techniques of farming. This took time and many were still doubtful. Harinder Pal himself had to take the lead and show that tractors would yield better wheat. He had to work hard to convince people about the need for irrigation and fertilisers. But once they saw the results, the villagers were all convinced, and they were so enterprising that in a short while their whole village had got transformed into what it is today. Even their women had got trained and learnt many new things about the farm, about cooking, about child-care, health and disease and about cleanliness. Uncle added, that the old idea that our villagers are ignorant or unwilling to learn is no longer true in many parts of the country and surely not here. Many adults had even learnt to read and write. But more important than that was the fact they had open minds and were willing to enquire, to learn, to change and grow as fast as possible. They were adventurous and they were happy, buoyant and contented. This visit was such an eye-opener to the children that they came back, delighted, and excited and talked about it for days. They also became humble and more sensitive to life in a village. They had grown to love their cousin Devinder and promised to return every holiday.

Have you ever visited a village in your part of the country? Have your experiences been somewhat like those of these two children? What more can you add that can give us a glimpse of a prosperous village?

If different, what have you seen that has perhaps made you sad? Let us remember that, alas, not all our villages are as prosperous as some of these. We do have rich villages that produce wheat, rice, cotton, maize, pulses, and grains of all sorts. We do have tea and coffee estates and so on. But only some are prosperous. In the vast majority of them the people are very poor and can hardly have one meal a day. Not all villagers own land. Some do, others work for them, till the soil and do all the hard work, but are paid very little. There is exploitation. There is poverty, squalor, dirt, disease. There is superstition. Very few girls go to school. Girls are regarded as inferior to boys. Women live in great hardship. Often men indulge in drink. There is great sorrow. These are also the realities we see in villages. But the question is that if in twenty years some villages like

Devinder's can be such happy, prosperous places, there is no reason why others can't be the same. Is it because we have not cared for them, not cared to share our education and knowledge with them?

Do go into the villages and find out for yourself what the real state of India is, and happily, one day, you may feel inspired to do something to improve their lot.

31. On Pressure

Have you ever examined this question? What are the pressures that operate upon you in your daily life?

There is the pressure of having to complete assignments, projects, homework. There is the pressure of tests and examinations which are always there like the sword of Damocles. The progress report causes tremendous pressure.

There are the teachers who wield subtle pressure depending on their personality and your relationship with them, their opinion of you, their likes and dislikes.

Of course, one may not recognise this as a pressure, but one's classmates do exercise a great deal of pressure on you. You feel you can't be different from them in dress or appearance, in the language you use, the games you play, the recreations you seek. The group exerts pressure on the individual.

Again, parents are a source of tremendous pressure though you and your parents will not like the use of such an expression. Their expectations are usually that you must be the best in the class or among the best, that you must score high marks in every subject whether you like that subject or not, that you must pass out of school brilliantly, that you must qualify in all entrance examinations to colleges, universities, etc., that you must do exceedingly well at the university, get a good job, earn well, marry the right person and settle down happily. Every parent wants his child to succeed in life, and, success according to most people means getting a good job, having a good reputation, earning enough money and comforts, and, living 'happily'. Whatever they could or could not get in their own lives but wanted to, they want their children to have, and more. Their love and concern is a pressure, a strong force in your life and you mould yourself according to their desires. Do you notice this happening to you?

Strangely enough, your elders and parents are themselves the victims of the pressure of society upon them. Only successful people have a status in society. Money has a status in society, so too power. Society seems to worship money and power and it exercises pressure on parents and others to keep seeking money and power. They seem to be trapped in this wheel called society. What shall we do?

Shall we examine what society is and why it exercises so much power on us? Would you agree that society is a collection of individuals, of you and me and other people? If this is so, should we blindly agree that what the group thinks is right and has to be followed by all? If the group thinks one should not marry outside one's caste, it exercises pressure on a man or woman to conform to the group's ideas on marriage. Should we not ask ourselves if it is prejudiced? Its ideas may be old fashioned and a man who is afraid will be subdued by the pressure of the group. But if a man believes that dividing people into castes is evil then he will not be afraid of the opinions of society. He will act

according to his own clarity. So, being intelligent and clear in the mind is the right thing rather than following blindly the beliefs of society.

At the same time, we see many young people, particularly from the West, reacting and revolting against the beliefs of society in an extreme manner and becoming 'hippies' - They wear dirty clothes, do not shave, they take drugs wandering all over the globe, do not work, and so on. Do you think this kind of revolt is intelligent? Will it not harm them? Is this kind of revolt wise?

If we revolt against society in this negative way, we create a new group with its own pressures. So the question is how do we live and work in society and yet not feel its pressures? For this, it is important that we start with ourselves because we are the people who form society. We have to understand how our thoughts are formed, how prejudices arise, how society influences our action, so that we can be free of such pressure.

The next time when you have to answer an exam or speak in public or take your report card home or answer your parents about where you have been, the next time you sense you are under pressure, will you go into it intelligently, question it and help yourself to be free of it? Let us begin with small things and try to understand how little pressures make our lives tense and unhappy. With this understanding there may be freedom and joy.

32. The Sorrow of Division

One of the greatest sorrows of the world is that man is divided against man. This earth of ours with its vast expanse of water, its variety of land ranging from the wide open deserts to lofty mountains, its astonishing differences in climate and culture, its exquisite relation with the sun and the moon and the stars, this earth, could be quite an extraordinary place for man to live in happily, spending his time and energy in his quest for its many secrets. Yet, if you observe what is happening in the world, you will observe first of all, that the peoples of the world, far from regarding themselves as the inheritors of a common earth, have divided themselves into nationalities: the French, the Germans, the English, the Americans, the Russians, the Chinese, the Indians, the Pakistanis, and so on. Each nation has its own geographic boundary and the people living in a particular area of the earth think of themselves as belonging only to that part of the earth and develop a close loyalty to that piece of land, to their own tribe, their own customs, language, and way of life. So strong is this bond that the people next door who belong to another geographic boundary are looked upon with suspicion. A wall grows immediately between nation and nation for that is inevitable when you separate yourself from others. So, we do not regard ourselves as human beings belonging to one large family of the earth but as nations with different types of governments, different leaders, different economies and different policies. This is unfortunate, for the result is that there is a sharp division, not only outwardly through boundaries between lands, but inwardly in the mind of mankind. In fact, divisions start within the mind of man and express themselves outwardly as nation versus nation, religion versus religion, group versus group, and so on, resulting in the most devastating wars the earth has ever seen since its origin.

Wars seem to take place because the minds of the people of the world are so shaped and conditioned in divisions, in love of one's country and hatred of another; because violence has become our way of life. Can you imagine what that actually means? It

means that if you are an Englishman and if your country is at war with Germany, as it happened in the last World War, your city is the victim of an air-raid, and one fine morning you get out of bed and find your father, mother, brother, sister killed in an instant, your house burnt down, your friends wailing and destruction as far as the eye can see. Innocent people, but destroyed because they called themselves 'English'. It could happen the other way too. A German family may be blown to bits. This is the meaning of war: senseless, ruthless killing with no gain whatsoever. What is worse is, mankind is piling armaments, more and more sophisticated armaments. You may have heard of them: cruise missiles, F-16's, MIG's, atom bombs, submarines, nuclear weapons, and so on, newer and crueller forms of killing each other. Millions are wounded and maimed for life. Cities and civilisations have been wiped out, for man has fought wars from time immemorial. The difference is that if a nuclear war were to break out now the planet cannot survive, for nuclear weapons have the power to destroy not only human lives, but plants, animals, trees, birds, the whole of life on earth.

Think of the divisions that exist even today between nation and nation all over the globe; think of how peoples are divided by the colour of their skin, the blacks and the whites and so on and the sufferings of the peoples of South Africa. Or nearer home, think of the suspicion and the gulf that exists between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Likewise, religious divisions have caused war both historically and even today, between the Hindus and the Muslims, the Christians and the Jews. A religion is supposed to help a person understand his place in the universe, his relationship with God and man. It is supposed to help him transcend the earthly bondages he acquires through life. Instead, these labels seem to create anger, frustration, dominance, violence and hatred. Isn't that the greatest sorrow of man?

Experts say that world governments spend about one thousand billion dollars on armaments per year and if all wars stopped, there would be enough money to feed, clothe and house all the peoples of the world. Think of another kind of division that exists now between the richer countries and the poorer countries, where poverty kills the human spirit, or of the division between the rich and the poor in the same country. Isn't that tragic?

Look at our own country, India. What are the divisions within the country? Do you say, "I am a Maharashtrian", "I am a Bengali", "I am a Tamilian", "I am a Punjabi", etc., or do you say "I am an Indian", and further more, can you say "I am a human being"? What do grown-ups in this country say and do now? Aren't they all divided in their minds and hearts and therefore in their behaviour? One state against another; one language against another; one community against another; one caste against another; one sub-caste against another. What is happening to us? Isn't it a very sad thing that inspite of all the culture and the glory of the past that we are so proud of and speak of so often, we should be such a divided nation? Could we go to the root cause of division itself, that is, to the mind of man, in order to take a different turn altogether?

Can we help our minds see that all divisions are mischievous? After all, underneath the skin, as it were, human beings are all alike. We all suffer, we all rejoice. We get angry, we get jealous. We are ambitious. We are kind. We are gentle. We have feelings, we have hurts. We discover, we invent. Aren't human beings really and truly alike even though they may look different? Some are white, some black, some brown, some yellow;

some are tall, some short; some beautiful, some ugly but underneath the superficialities, mankind is one.

Will you build a better world when your turn comes? Will you do something in little ways or big to end the sorrow of division? Will you look after this beautiful earth of ours and care for it and help it remain the home of all the peoples of the world? That would indeed be a wonderful thing to work for.

33. A Dialogue

Do you notice that everybody seems to want 'freedom'? Children want freedom at school; mother wants freedom at home; father in the office. Teachers want freedom and the principal wants freedom, too. Birds like to be free and trees demand freedom to grow. Animals are most unhappy when caged or bound. The politician wants freedom. The scientist asks for freedom. Birds, trees, animals and man — they all seem to need freedom, space in which to grow. Nobody likes to be bound. Do you notice this? Shall we discuss it further?

The teacher initiated this dialogue in class one morning and you could see the faces of the children light up for they found this much more exciting than learning maths or physics, history or geography. A lively discussion followed which went somewhat like this:

TEACHER: When you say you want 'freedom' what do you actually mean?

PUPIL: I think it means 'being able to do what one likes to do and not what one has to do'

TEACHER: Is that so? Suppose you like to sleep late, get up only when your body feels like it, bathe or not bathe depending upon your mood, dress shabbily and come leisurely, just when you like, to school and not in time for the morning assembly, would that give you a feeling of being free?

PUPIL: No, that would not be right because I would miss many things. But again, when we occasionally come late, I do not think we should be punished. When we are punished, we do not feel free.

Then the teacher started the discussion along another line of thought. She wanted the class to look at the problem from another angle.

TEACHER: All right, let us look at what freedom means in the life of a teacher. Can a teacher do what he likes?

PUPIL: Certainly not (*in chorus*).

TEACHER: For example, he cannot say he will correct the notebooks when he feels like it; he cannot come unprepared to class and teach without coherence; he cannot refuse any assignment given by the principal and so on,

PUPIL: The same rules hold for the teacher as well.

TEACHER: Yes, do you see that freedom and responsibility go together?

PUPIL: But then, to whom is the principal responsible? He can do what he likes.

TEACHER: No, he can't. He is responsible to parents, to the public, to the community at large.

And also to the teacher and pupils in the school. You see, freedom calls for the highest responsibility. That is so in the government also. The legislators are responsible to the people who elected them and so too the Prime Minister and his cabinet.

PUPIL: In a dictatorship there is no freedom, is there? TEACHER: No, because in a dictatorship only one man's judgement counts and everybody else is afraid of him. Have you not heard it said that where there is fear there can be no freedom?

PUPIL: But in democracies also we see fear sometimes. TEACHER: Can you give examples?

PUPIL: The businessman is afraid of the laws; the poor man is afraid of the rich man; managements are afraid of strikes.

TEACHER: But in a democracy, people can talk about this, write about this, is it not?

PUPIL: Yes, newspapers publish all the wrong that is going on and so people have to be watchful.

TEACHER: Yes, indeed, in a democracy the Press is a very important avenue for people's freedom.

PUPIL: But yet the people continue to be afraid.

TEACHER: Tell me, are you afraid? PUPIL: Yes, we are afraid sometimes.

TEACHER: Can you learn if you are afraid?

PUPIL: No, I am too agitated to learn.

TEACHER: Then what will you do? What do you do?

PUPIL: I give up learning and do something else that eases the mind.

TEACHER: But that is not intelligent. Isn't it better to find out why you were afraid, of what you are afraid and try to understand your fears so that after dealing with them your mind may be free to learn?

PUPIL: What do you mean by 'dealing with them'? The cause may not be in our hands.

TEACHER: Yes, that is so, but by going on thinking about your fears and anxieties are you helping yourself?

It was on these lines their dialogue continued that day. Perhaps you can go into these questions, too.

You see, man is full of curiosity and wonder. He has investigated and tried to find out everything about nature. He has patiently observed and studied the ways of birds and animals. He has probed into space and tried to understand all about stars and planets and the universe. He has delved into the ocean and gathered a lot of knowledge about oysters and pearls, about whales and seals and dolphins and the whole of the under-ocean world. He has studied the story of man and the civilisations that existed. He has discovered caves and rocks and fossils that help him understand that story. He has made extraordinary discoveries in medicine and surgery. That is, he has shown a great deal of

curiosity and wonder about the world outside him and has gathered enormous knowledge about that world.

The teacher in this class is asking the children to delve into the world inside them, into their minds and hearts and to observe what helps them learn and what does not. She is asking them to watch and learn about the blocks to freedom, their fears and anxieties, Their interest and attention and so on.

Would you agree that this study of ourselves is as important as the other about the outside world?

Would you like to have some dialogues about these things in your own class or at home?

Think upon these things.

34. Ravi's Quest for the Meaning of Religion

Ravi was a sensitive boy of fourteen. From the time he was eight or nine he had that deep feeling for something unnameable, for something beyond all description and this feeling had persisted. When watching the sun rise, when walking alone, when listening to great music, when tending a plant, there would be a strong urge welling up in him to find out for himself who God was, where he lived, if anyone had seen him, and so on. He noticed how the rose fades away by the evening, how plants wither away, how all life, whether animal or man, comes to an end. He liked to be alone by himself when not studying in class. His mother was a devout Hindu and would regularly offer prayers at the temple near by. Ravi would accompany her sometimes of an evening and he liked the atmosphere surrounding the worship of a beautiful image. The lights, the incense, the sheer beauty of an *arti* austere performed, those moved him inwardly- Could God be in that image, he wondered? And yet, if God is all powerful why should he reside only in stone images? Is God a person at all like man? These questions nagged him often.

His sister had married a Christian in a church. That day Ravi was deeply moved by the wonderful decorum and order there, the hymns that were sung and the simple ceremony that followed. The architectural beauty of the cathedral, the huge domes, lights, candles had made him feel different. Did God reside here alone, he wondered? Why do they call him the Saviour? That evening he read parts of the Bible before going to sleep.

There was a mosque near by and often from the terrace at noon he saw-large numbers of men kneel and bend in prayer and the profound depth and volume of their prayer struck a chord in his heart. Did Islam have the answer to his question, he wondered. His best friend was a Muslim boy, Kasim, and he found out from his father that the word 'Islam' meant 'peace'. The Muslims believe that all men are brothers and should live in peace and friendship.

At school he had read in his history class the extraordinary story of Prince Siddhartha and of how he gave up the comforts and wealth of a king's life, gave up even his wife and child and went forth alone into the forest to seek that truth that liberates all mankind, and he came to be known as Gautama the Buddha who gave his *dhamma* to the world. The *dhamma* taught people the cause of human suffering and how to end the suffering. Ravi had a small image of the Buddha on his study table and was particularly impressed by the

serene face. He also learnt at school of Guru Nanak and the religion of the Sikhs, its depth and wisdom, its powerful message of peace and love for all mankind and of Mahavira and the founding of the great Jain religion which proclaimed the sanctity of all life.

In every religion there seemed to be inherent the same urge expressed by man to come into contact with something much nobler, greater and much more expansive. Every religion spoke of compassion and the brotherhood of man. He was truly puzzled as to why people of different faiths often killed each other when in essence the great teacher of every religion spoke only of living with each other as brothers, of the beauty of love, and of not hurting one another. His parents were proud that at so young an age there was so much wisdom in him. Occasionally his class referred to him as the 'philosopher' but they respected him.

Once he entered into a serious discussion with his father who taught philosophy at the university. What do all religions say? In what ways are they similar? And his father explained that only the outer forms of religions differ, like rituals and poojas and places of worship are different; festivals and customs are different, but these are merely outward things. In essence, all religions preached the oneness of man, of fellow beings and exhorted all the peoples of the earth to live together in harmony. Religions also proclaimed that everything is impermanent in this world. Whatever is born must die. Change is the principle of life. Ravi listened and wondered how he would find out the truth for himself.

He had an uncle who would point out to him with great affection that he felt there must be a supreme Energy pervading all life in the universe and man has always yearned to be one with that Energy, giving up his petty little self-centred activity. This Great Spirit cannot be confined to places of worship alone, he had said. Service to fellow human beings and care of animal and plant life was to him the greatest religion.

Listening to him, Ravi felt that there was a lot of wisdom in what he said but he was bothered about the many superstitions that had grown around various religions and wanted a scientific explanation. He was not going to be carried away by the beliefs of any one person or group.

Once Ravi found a book on the history of religions in the school library and looked through it in the study period. He discovered one very interesting point: when early man saw the vast skies and the heavens and heard something of their fury in the thunder and lightning, he was afraid and worshipped nature. Gradually he also saw the wonders of nature, the sunrise and the sunset, the seasons and the vast expanse of water and they developed in him a feeling of kinship with nature. Early man never sought to conquer nature. He felt related to the skies and the stars, to trees and plants, to fish and fowl, to the seas and the waters. In ancient India man was deeply aware of the sanctity of all life. That was for him the basis of a truly religious spirit. Ravi was impressed with the idea. True, he thought, discovering your relationship with nature must be the first step to finding out what Truth is.

Have you ever been serious about things in life? Do you not think that religion is important in life? Even great scientists who study life on this planet and the galaxies have begun to get a glimpse of the inner life that pervades the universe. If in temperament you

are like Ravi, do not feel shy and smother the feeling of curiosity within you. Find out for yourself more about the inner part of life.

35. What Does Progress Mean?

Has man really progressed from ancient times up till now? What does progress mean? What does civilisation mean?

Think about this. If you read the story of man over the ages there has, of course, been tremendous change in the way he lives and works. Think of early man as a hunter, wild and naked, to whom hunting was a way of life, or of the shepherd who grazed his sheep in pastures green, and think of modern man and his way of life today, particularly in an industrialised society where he enjoys the fruits of his ingenuity and invention. Surely, that is progress at one level.

Contrast the life of the early farmer who settled in small communities and used simple tools for growing his food with the highly mechanised farms. They use the tools of technology today to produce high yields of crops from the same earth. Consider also the way machines have helped man toil less and save labour and sweat. Think of the clothes man has woven over the ages. From the hand spun cloth, from the spinning wheel to the modern textile industry that produces bales of cotton or synthetics. Houses of mud and clay to skyscrapers, offices, factories, and a myriad buildings baffling the eye. Food, clothes, shelter have all changed from ancient time till now after century upon century of progress.

What is progress then? Is it the evolution of man's mind and capacities, the growth of his capacity to adapt to environment making himself its master rather than its slave?

Look at another side of his growth, his conquest of space and time. The story is one of steady achievement, from the bullock cart to the jet plane; from pigeons that carried letters to satellites that convey messages instantly; from the box camera to the television and video-conferencing by which people can hold conferences viewing each other from distant towns. Consider also man's exploration into outer space and the marvels of space technology, man's landing on the silver moon of yester years, man's probe into other planets, the extraordinary sophistication of man's genius in mastering the technology of annihilating time and space. You can find out about many more such examples of how man has delved into the secrets of nature.

Biology was a simple science once, but with the discovery of the DNA a whole new vista has opened up. Man today can produce life in a test tube! Genetic engineering teaches him even to alter those states of life. The marvels of bio-technology are about to bloom. Is man master now not only of space and time but of his own evolution as a species? Discuss this and find out more about the wonders of biological science. No longer does it mean cutting up frogs and cockroaches. It is a new window upon man's life on earth, even as its sister science, medicine, has made gigantic leaps, particularly in the field of surgery. Think of heart transplantations, brain operations, neurosurgery and the combating of serious diseases like tuberculosis or cancer.

Another amazing discovery is the computer which can do practically all the functions of the brain and with greater precision and correctness. Man need not carry loads of information in the brain anymore, for the computer is his most reliable bank. Man need

not calculate and solve elaborate mathematical problems struggling with numbers. The computer does it in minutes. The computer can help you make choices, decisions, it helps you do business; it runs factories; it has eased communications and travel; it has invaded the office and even the home. It plays games; it can produce music and poetry; it can even correct its own mistakes! It has taken over most of the functions of man. He has plenty of time now for mischief!

What does progress mean then? Is it the growth of man's faculties of discovery and inventiveness? When we say man has progressed from a state of barbarism to his highly civilised position today, we have all these symbols.

End